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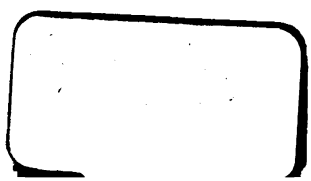

RULING THE ROAST.

RULING THE ROAST.

A Novel.

BY LADY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "SABINA," "ON CREDIT," "WILD WEATHER,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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RULING THE ROAST.

CHAPTER I.

"Few, none, find what they love or could have loved,
Though accident, blind compact, and the strong
Necessity of loving have removed
Antipathies, but to return ere long,
Envenomed by irrevocable wrong.
And circumstance, that unspiritual god
And mis-creator, makes and helps along
Our coming evils with a crutch-like rod,
Whose touch turns hope to dust—the dust we all have trod."

Byron.

It was a bright evening in August, and the sun flung his slant rays through the open casement into the small study of a country curacy, containing two persons.

The female must first be presented to the reader. She was a beautiful girl,

nearly seventeen, with flowing curls, a brilliant skin, and a graceful figure, slim and maidenly. On her left hand was a grey worsted sock, and in the spot where the venerable great toe of the wearer had pressed there was a gaping hole as big as half-a-crown, which the girl, Myra by name, was bent on reducing to a minimum by transverse lines of grey worsted, of which she made a kind of interlaced basket-work. She was accustomed to her labour, and did not fret over it, as did her companion over his. He was a tall, slender young man of five-and-twenty; and, though he had arrived at that mature age, he was and had been the pupil of the young lady's father for a year and a half. He had rather projecting light blue eyes, fair skin, and light eyelashes and eyebrows, —a kind of man whose full face in a picture you would scarcely recognize. He seemed all profile: so hooked was his nose, so flat and retreating his head, so narrow his fore-

head. His chin, as if ashamed of the prominence of his nose, retreated in a bird-like manner into his throat. His mouth was small, and his lips thin. His whiskers made an attempt to grow, but were of ragged sandy hair, more sparse on the left than on the right side. His hair was straight, and with a little inclination to red, but that was but slight. Every colour about him was faint in tint. His person and his dress were scrupulously neat and clean; his dress fashionably made, as became the second son of the Earl of Arras, the Honourable Peath Sandridge.

"Oh!" said the gentleman, looking very red about the rims of his eyes, "how very trying the Greek character is to the sight."

"Is it?" replied the girl, indifferently, pinching the end of the lambswool thread over the needle, and then applying it dexterously to the long eye. "I suppose it is, when one is not accustomed to it. Of anything familiar a glance conveys the idea, and the eye is less strained."

Peath Sandridge had his Greek Testament in his hand, and was puzzling over the Gospel according to Saint Mark. The other hand supported his head.

"Do hear me say these few verses, Myra."

Myra in reply twitched the Greek Testament from before him, and placed it where some rolls of her father's mended socks prevented her pupil catching sight of the character—"*Eukopoteron esti Kameelon dia tees trumalias tees*," Peath had arrived at when he stopped.

"Oh! you ought to remember *that*," cried the girl, and leaning forward she pricked him gently with the point of her needle.

The young man was not quick enough to understand. He only cried "Oh!"

"*Rraphidos*," cried Myra, doubling the *r* in her impatience. "Look it out."

"My dictionary is in my room," said

Peath. "Won't you tell me, to save me the trouble of getting it?"

"You will forget again directly. Take my father's great 'Liddell and Scott.'"

The young man opened the volume to turn to the R's, but stopped, for he came on something he had not anticipated. It was a pencil sketch of Myra, with a figure even more girlish than it now appeared. In fact, it was in a pinafore, with her opulence of hair tossed about her shoulders, and her eyes gleaming with a light which seemed almost living from their dark lashes and brows.

"Dear me! there is a picture of you, Miss Leith," said the gentleman, blushing.

"Is there? I did not know it," said the girl, rising and going round to look over the dictionary.

"Yes, there is the date," said Peath. "Two years ago—nearly—it's very like. May I ask who was the artist?"

Myra did not answer directly, she was

trying to make out three words in Greek which had been written in pencil, and partially obliterated. They did not attract the less skilled eyes of Peath. Σὺ ὀυδεὶς ἴσος. "None is equal to you." The artist seemed to apply it in his mind to the inferiority of the sketch to the original.

Myra flushed, and Peath, looking up to see why she did not answer, observed the deepened colour, and thought that there must be some mystery connected with the portrait.

"It was done by one of the Doctor's pupils," said the girl indifferently. "And now look there—that is more important to you than all the pictures in the universe." She pointed to a distant meadow, across which a figure moved in a shovel hat and clerical dress. "My father will expect you to repeat that chapter of Mark—tenth chapter—up to the end of the twenty-fifth verse before tea, so do look sharp. Let me see how much you know," and putting down

the mended sock with the foot turned in on the top of its fellow, previously mended, she sat herself down magisterially to hear her pupil go through his lesson.

"That is pretty well," she said. "I hope you can conjugate the tenses of the verbs, and decline the nouns."

"I wonder how you can know so much," observed Peath.

"It has been my food day and night, as David says, ever since I can remember. My father had no amusement but in teaching me. I learnt the Greek characters at the same time that I learnt my Roman letters. When I grew older I used to teach papa's pupils. When I was quite a little girl I had to teach those who were most backward, to save the Doctor trouble. Poor dear papa! he taught me the only things he knew, but I am dreadfully deficient in modern languages. I really think, Mr. Sandridge, you might teach me a little French and Italian."

Peath had heard that proposition before, but though he could speak French with a pure accent, he was fearful of showing that he knew nothing of the language grammatically; and of Italian he was perfectly ignorant, so he avoided the subject whenever it was broached.

The Earl of Arras had written thus to his son:

"*Castle Clear, August* 19, 18—.

"DEAR PEATH,

"Read hard, and get over your examination as soon as possible. I have arranged privately with the Reverend Mr. Playfair that you shall go at once to the living after ordination, to act as his curate till you obtain priest's orders—you retaining the tithes when collected.

"Your affectionate father,

"ARRAS."

CHAPTER II.

"Happy Arcadians, O Daphnis,-O Chloe! Success to love and potatoes! The golden age is restored. Daphnis has again his pipe, and Chloe's pet lamb is resuscitated till the day when disenchantment converts it into chops." —*The Marble Heart.*

PEATH SANDRIDGE had run a brief career in the army, to the distress of his father's pocket. Then the small living of Birch-wood-cum-Slokum seemed likely to be soon vacated by a clergyman, who had the promise of another too distant to be held in conjunction with it. It was suggested to Peath that he had better go into the Church, and receive four hundred and eighty pounds yearly, than remain in the army, and spend five hundred pounds yearly, receiving nothing. He was no

unwilling, except that to be ordained a certain amount of biblical knowledge and of the dead languages must be acquired. He did not like the army. The officers seemed to him to be intolerable, a set of young bears, the sixth form boys without a head master. Their practical jokes he declared to be ungentlemanlike, which opinion most well-bred folks would endorse. The officers on their part said that Sandridge was "slow,"—a man without spirit or energy. They did not regret it when he announced at mess that he had sent in his papers; and he prepared for the care of souls instead of the possible destruction of bodies, with tranquil satisfaction. He had been an Eton boy, but had managed to escape any tincture of learning whilst there; consequently he had given Doctor Leith and his daughter a great amount of labour in instructing him. I regret to state that the circumstances under which he first saw Miss Leith, then

aged fifteen years and a half, were by no means romantic ones. The Honourable Mr. Peath Sandridge arrived at the curacy held by Doctor Leith an hour sooner than he was anticipated. He was shown into the sitting-room, the Doctor being gone out to visit a sick person.

The meanly-furnished room did not offer many attractions. There was a gigantic work-basket, which still seemed too small for its bulging contents, a small Horace, and Lucan's "Pharsalia." The only English works were a Bible and Prayer-book. He looked helplessly out of the window on to a grass plot shaded with apple trees. The windows opened on to this miniature orchard, and Peath, tired of doing nothing, and regarding the Horace and the Lucan with the same favour that a patient at a dentist's looks on a case of surgical instruments, opened the window and stepped out on the limited expanse of grass. This was soon surveyed, and he

turned the corner of the house, and came into the kitchen garden, in which the Doctor was in the habit of working for hours, for the benefit both of his health and of his pocket.

A widower with one girl, Myra, he had taken several pupils at a time for a number of years, and no harm had come of it. One yokel, to attend to the knives and forks, boots and shoes, and one maid-servant of all work, were the whole of his establishment. Now, Susan the maid was well stricken in years, and like other females in her position, was unwilling to exert herself more than was necessary.

"Miss Myra, my dear, just step into the garden and dig up some potatoes for dinner. Here is the young gentleman coming to-day, and that lazy fellow has left me without a potato to be had for love or money."

Myra was singing to herself, "And are ye sure the news is true?" and went obe-

diently to dig up the potatoes. She had just got her foot valiantly on the top of the heavy spade, and was raising herself on it by jerks, to impel it into the earth, when she heard a rustle of branches behind her, and turning her head suddenly she beheld the new pupil. Her face was framed round with luxuriant hair of dark brown tint, which fell in rich curls over her shoulders. Sparkling eyes, white teeth, a delicate little nose, a little curved upwards, and a graceful figure, made Myra as beautiful a girl at sixteen as could be seen on a summer's day. Myra was broad browed and broad at the eyes. Mr. Sandridge was narrow at the eyes. Hers were dark lashed and large. His pale and with no lashes in particular. What a terrible degradation for a lady to be digging up potatoes with no gloves, and with pretty slender fingers as brown as those of a gipsy !

Myra, after the first start and its consequent blush, was by no means abashed.

"You are the new pupil," she said. "I am Miss Leith. I am digging up potatoes for your dinner, or you will have to go without, for Colin is gone to the village, and there is no saying when he will return."

"Can I help you?" asked the young gentleman, ashamed of seeing the young mistress of the house so occupied.

"Yes, if you pick up the largest of those potatoes and put them into this measure. There! I'm sure those are as many as you ought to require."

"But you will want some too?" asked the youth, who rather fancied the notion of the fine potatoes freshly dug from the earth.

"Bless you!" said Myra carelessly, "my father and I dined at one o'clock. As you did not come in time, you will have a chop and some potatoes at our tea-time. But here is my father, now good luck to your *tuptoing*."

"Do you know any Greek?" asked the youth, looking at her with more distaste

than the sight of the brown hands had provoked.

"Half-a-dozen words," said the girl gaily, "and double that number of Latin."

Doctor Leith found his pupil very much impressed by a notion of his own importance and disinclined for work.

Mr. Sandridge staid for a year and a a half in the curacy of Northley-cum-Loame, during which time he fell in love with Myra, and contrived to work his love and his theological knowledge into his brain simultaneously. Myra knew and cared nothing about his love—

> "Young she was, and all unskilled
> How to make a lover yield."

He had forgiven her knowledge of Greek and Latin, for Myra thought nothing of her learning, which her father always depreciated, calling her "an unprofitable servant." Her father did so because he measured her amount of information, not by that possessed by his pupils, but by

his own. Peath found Myra a firm support on every occasion,—a helper of a lame dog over stiles innumerable. Myra dug up potatoes for his dinner on many occasions, and continued to distil his lesson for him into his mind at unexpected times, so sweetened by her sweetness, that he swallowed them as children do nauseous powders between sugared bread-and-butter. I regret to say that Myra talked slang sometimes, as a palliative to her pure English and classical knowledge. Myra was conscious by long experience of her father's pupils that nothing makes a girl so much disliked as the suspicion that she is skilled in the learned languages ; but Peath forgave the stoutness of the bridge which carried him over. She "coached" him through the Gospels, aided his stumbling steps through the Epistle to the Hebrews, and related to him the ancient history of the Jews so frequently, in their summer evening walks, that he absolutely began to remember all about the ten tribes.

"I cannot," he had begun by saying.

"How do you know the road to Wildford?" asked the girl.

"Because," replied the pupil, "we have walked it so frequently together."

"Quite true," said the indefatigable instructress; "and if we go over the lesson as frequently, you will know that also as well."

It was not only his mind but his wardrobe of which Myra took charge.

"Before I knew you, Myra," said the youth tenderly and enthusiastically, "I was a miserable man."

"Yes?" replied Myra, in an inquiring tone.

"It was the washerwomen," continued Mr. Sandridge, in a plaintive voice. "I believe they banded themselves together to drive me distracted. Before I came here I never could depend on having a button on my shirts. Since I have known you I have never wanted one."

Peath Sandridge was, as we have seen, still in the agonies of swallowing the Greek Testament, when he was first introduced to the reader. Myra had done her best for him with the tenth chapter of Saint Mark, and now was not sorry to put the roll of her lambswool socks into the giant work-basket, and go out walking to meditate in the eventide, like Isaac; and not only to feel the quieting influences of the soft breeze and the sun's decline, but to enjoy the coolness of the hour on her flushed cheek and brow. "Helping lame dogs is an irritating process," Myra said to herself. "I must say the poor fellow seems very grateful. It saves papa trouble, and I should fear that if he be 'spun,' plucked, or whatever may be the last slang name for it, the Doctor may have some difficulty in getting another pupil, the success of the pupil reflecting on the tutor."

Myra felt a little protecting tenderness to the man who was eight years her senior;

a very agreeable manageable goose she considered him. And then she thought of another pupil who had lived with them just before Mr. Sandridge had arrived. It was he who had made the sketch of Myra in her pinafore—that wonderful portrait which, all unfinished as it was, had seemed to possess a living soul.

CHAPTER III.

"To dodge dull care 'midst clustering trees,
And cool her forehead to the breeze."

MYRA liked to escape from the vicarage of Birchwood-cum-Loame, and from the land near it. Some kind person who cared for posterity had in former years planted the corner of some high ground with firs, probably the only trees which had a chance of growing in the inhospitable soil. They were tall majestic pines now, and swung in a stately manner to and fro when the wind was high, dropping their gaping cones on the ground, thick with the spiked foliage of former years. There was nothing but ploughed lands around this little knoll, and a hedge going down on one side of the field, along the shelter of

which Myra picked her way, regardless of detaining blackberry brambles and intrusive spines of black thorn. For man's neglect she loved it more. She had all the instincts of a poet, a painter, and a musician, without being conscious of them. The murmur of the trees over her head, the fugitive tints of sunset on the light clouds which floated over the clear blue sky, the burnished gold of the red fir stems, all conspired to fill her with tranquil pleasure. In the valley below a little smoke went up from the chimney of the vicarage. She knew, and fancy presented the picture of Susan, fussing over the kitchen fire, with bacon hissing in the frying-pan, and four eggs poppling in the saucepan for her father's tea and Peath's. She felt glad to escape from the cares of home for a while. She had seated herself on the trunk of a fallen pine tree, and had taken off her hat to feel the cool air more completely. Presently she heard a step

behind her, and knowing that no labourer was likely to come that way, she felt a momentary uneasiness lest the wanderer might be a tramp. So she arose, and looking about her she perceived a familiar face, which bore a winning smile.

"Myra!" cried the new comer, "I felt certain I should find you here;" and he came up and offered his hand, advancing with what seemed a desire to kiss her.

Myra did not approve of kissing, so she shook his hand at arm's length.

"Where did you come from, where are you going, and why did you come?" the girl asked hurriedly.

The youth sat himself down on the fallen fir tree.

"You address to me the questions I have heard the Doctor ask of every beggar that comes into the village of Birchwood. Now, I do not mean to hurry myself, and I will tell you *verbatim et seriatim*, or seriously, as Jack Sylvestre translated it. Answer to the

first question—I am come from the Continent; to the second—I am going to London probably. The third I will discuss in the future. Now sit down by my side like a darling little girl as you used to be, because I want to talk about myself, the pleasantest subject in the world to me. You know you always used to listen under such trying circumstances."

"But stop, do you know the time?" said Myra. "The sun tells me that if we go down to the vicarage you will have some tea. Let us go. My father will be very glad to see you again."

"My dear, your father is a very worthy man—a most admirable scholar! In his knowledge of Greek roots he is unparalleled. All the same, I had rather not see him. I hope he is perfectly well, but I shall be satisfied with your assertion of the fact, without its ocular demonstration."

"Think of a cosy tea with cream in it!" cried Myra. "Think of the bacon and

eggs. They are stunning! The hens have done their duty excellently. I found three clutches on the top of the old wall amongst the ivy."

"Thank you, no. The Doctor's stern face would make the cream sour. His hardness would be transferred to the eggs; and the addition of his Attic salt to that of the bacon would render it uneatable—But how beautiful you have become, Myra."

"Thank you, Sandal; but I was not aware that you thought me ugly before."

"No; you were always the loveliest creature in creation to me.

'Not in those climes where I have late been straying,
Though beauty long has there been matchless deemed,'

did I see anything to equal you."

"Especially in a pinafore, with my hair like the flower old Colin calls 'the devil in a bush.'"

The young man looked puzzled for a few minutes, then he laughed.

"Ah! you have found the sketch," he said. "I had forgotten where I put it. It is not equal to you in any way."

"Did you take your degree, or were you plucked or spun, Mr. Sandal? We looked out for you amongst the honours, and then amongst the polls, but you were not there that we could discover."

"No," cried the youth, indifferently; "I did not go into the senate house at all. The fact was that my friend, Lord Mountorrent, voted mathematics and classics slow, and offered to frank me if I would go abroad with him for eighteen months, and study modern languages—French, Italian, German, modern Greek. All that I learned at Harrow, and with your father, was utterly useless."

Myra looked grave and rather offended. "He has not the courtesy of a gentleman," she thought. He looked at her downcast face, and surmised what had been the effect of his words.

"Unless as a foundation of other languages," he said, "of course; but the dead tongues are dead, and ought to be dead. No one talks them now—they are all dry rubbish."

"Did you learn to speak French and Italian when you were abroad?"

"Yes, a little. I like the language—that soft bastard Latin, which melts like kisses from a female mouth. But when in Italy I devoted my time to painting. The very land of art, music and poetry or painting, all that is loveliest in form, all that is most musical in song—verse and melody married."

"I must go home. See, the sunlight has declined into grey colours," said Myra, shivering.

"Don't go!" cried the youth—

"'By the first love-beat
Of the youthful heart,
By the bliss to meet,
And the pain to part!

"Nonsense!" said Myra; "you may come too, if you like."

"You are beautiful as a Peri, Myra—

> 'O mayst thou ever be as now thou art,
> Nor unbeseem the promise of thy spring.'

But for all that I withstand your manifold attractions and those of tea, with cream, eggs, and bacon, for a pint of beer and a short pipe at the public. You've got a pupil at the vicarage?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I know all about it. A lily-livered fellow—was in the Lancers. Mountorrent told me all about him."

"At any event," said Myra, with her anger rising, "he is a gentleman who does not run down the study of the dead languages to the daughter of the man who teaches them, and he prefers the society of cultivated people to a short pipe and a public-house."

She got up and walked towards home. Not so fast to give the idea that she was

alarmed, but with no lingering step in which the youth might read hesitation.

Sandal Tyne uttered entreaties precipitated one over another in his anxiety for her return. Then he begged she would meet him at the same place on the following evening; but Myra took no notice. She resented the reflection on her father's acquirements, and was sufficiently fond of Peath, in a protecting sort of way, to feel irritated at what Sandal Tyne had said of him.

"Myra!" he exclaimed, following her, "there is an old pocket-book of mine behind the 'State Trials' in the library. I wish you would bring it to me to-morrow."

Myra did not turn her head, but said, "You must come for it if you want it."

This he did not understand, and with the unconscious selfishness of youth which treads on the toes of its associates without perceiving it, he did not see what had so deeply offended Myra.

When she reached home she found Peath looking anxiously at the window for her appearance, whilst her father was deep in the "Times" newspaper. He contrived to get it on the second day, not being able to afford the abstraction of four pounds a-year from his income.

Myra poured out the tea with a hand shaking with exercise and irritation. Her first impulse was to tell her father of the interview with Sandal Tyne immediately; but she checked herself, remembering that she could not tell Peath all that Sandal might have said in confidence.

Peath's anxiety at her prolonged absence had carried him along the path which she frequently took in the evening, and he had seen her returning, with a figure following her in the distance. This was enough to make the simple-minded gentleman uncomfortably jealous. He longed to be alone with her, first for a little crow of pleasure at having done his Greek Testament satis-

factorily, and then to try to find out with whom she had been walking, and whether she had gone out for a tryst, or met her companion accidentally. What a dull-minded old man he considered the Doctor, to be so absorbed by the leaders of the "Times," when that lovely daughter of his was wandering alone, through hedgerow elms, on hillocks green, unattended. He was glad when the lamp was lighted and she was safely seated opposite her father, settled down to the absorbing interest of a game of chess. Then he might study Calmut's "History of the Bible" in peace, and look forward to that blessed period when all ordinations should be over, and he should be put into quiet possession of his living and Myra for his wife. He had no doubt of winning her—men never do doubt till they have had a refusal, and then they never can believe that it has been really meant.

Sandal Tyne, when he walked back to

the public-house, did it under a conviction that Myra loved him, and was angry because he would not go home. So Sandal went to the public-house, and ordered his bed; and drank his ale, and smoked his pipe with a Bill Gravel, a rat-catcher, on one side, with whom he conversed learnedly regarding the merits of a varmint terrier, who sat upon his haunches within his master's legs, like a little Indian Joss within the pillars of his temple, and showed his appreciation of the praises bestowed on his merits by gentle tappings of his tail on the sanded floor, and a white rim visible in one side of his thoughtful hazel eyes. On the other side was Giles Stoke, a pedlar and poacher. There was a stockman, too, "whose talk was of bullocks." Sandal Tyne heard all they said, and went on with his own train of thought. When the tap was shut up he went out and walked up and down in the soft moonlight, and

thought that Myra was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen ; and, having decided that point to his own satisfaction, he walked towards the vicarage to look at the window of the room where he knew Myra slept. Then he strung his thoughts into involuntary verse—

"The house is wrapt in silent gloom,
No step is passing on the floor,
And in thy dimly-curtained room
Thou sleepest, with a well-barred door.

"I fancy how thou wert just now,
Thy ribbon round thy fingers rolled,
Thy dark hair tossed from off thy brow,
Thy nightgown with its careless fold.

"On clasped hands thy fair face bent,
Whilst by the bedside thou wert kneeling
With supplications innocent,
Meekly for heaven's aid appealing.

"O girl ! ere to thy pillowed rest
That eager teeming brain was given,
Did any thought of one unblest
War in thy mind with thoughts of heaven ?"

Sandal had carried with him over the Continent a vivid remembrance of the beauty of Myra, just bursting into womanhood, when he had left her to go to

Cambridge. When there he had done nothing, spending his days in idleness, and his nights in riotous living. He had the assurance from his tutor that he might attain the highest honours if he chose, and he said that 'twas best not to try ; and to prove that assertion, he fell into a bad set of well-born young men like himself, where his mellow voice in singing, ready fluency in public speaking, and skill in sketching, made him the chosen companion of all who liked to loiter on the high road of life, and pluck the wild flowers on its borders. At length Lord Mountorrent bid highly for him as a companion to travel on the continent, and dismissed him on his return with a lavish gift of five hundred pounds on his Lordship attaining his majority.

This money in a lump seemed to Sandal interminable. Possessed of it, he thought he would go down and see Myra, whom he had remembered in all his debaucheries and

wanderings as the most attractive girl he had ever known. He did not like her father. He did not believe that Doctor Leith would consent to his marrying Myra, or even engaging himself to her. For that reason he had sought the spot which had ever been her favourite in former years, and where in the glory of that sunset evening he was pretty certain of finding her again. When there, he had managed to offend her by the awkwardness of his wooing. She was not so much gratified at the praise of the beauty which she knew she possessed, as mortified by his speaking so slightingly of the learning in which she knew her father to be pre-eminent. Then Peath—poor dear Peath, who never said uncivil things, nor smoked short pipes, how dared Sandal Tyne to call him a "lily-livered fellow"? She grew red whenever she thought of it.

Sandal was not disturbed by the exhibition of her anger. "It was only pretty

Myra's way." He felt sure she would meet him on the following evening; and wrote the invitation to the tryst in the following lines, which he was compelled to transcribe unto coarsely-ribbed blue paper, purchased at the public-house:—

"Meet me at gloaming where pine trees are rocking,
Where rooks to the tree-tops are whirling and flocking,
Where the red bark is burnished with beams of sun-setting,
And dark twisted branches heaven's fair roof are fretting.
Come like a saint to a fane so befitting,
To thine altar one worshipper only admitting;
Hear me swear by thy beauty how much I adore thee,
By the white robe of innocence ever flung o'er thee,
By the gleam of thine eyes, like the bright stars of even,
By the glow on thy cheek caught from rose-tints of heaven,
By thy vigour of health, by thy youth's supple graces,
By the charm which all memory of others effaces—
I swear I will love thee for ever and ever,
And yield up the hope of possessing thee—never!"

Sandal thought Myra would be pleased by his verses. He had found such very effective occasionally. He trusted a good deal to the fact that they would be the first love-verses Myra had ever received.

CHAPTER IV.

"Ah! what can application do,
Unless we have a genius too?
Or genius, how have cultivation,
Without due pains and application?"

SANDAL TYNE had a scheme in his head of coming out on the stage as Romeo. His voice was excellent; his person handsome, his declamation and imitations of living actors had been considered by his young companions inimitable. He would marry Myra and train her for the stage. What an exquisite Juliet would she make! He, who knew nothing of the stage, and had not had the probation even of a country barn, was ready to teach Myra an art of which he was utterly ignorant. He had a suspicion that Dr. Leith would not

regard his project with eyes of approbation, so he meant to get Myrà to run away with him. He could marry her in London as soon as they arrived there.

He went on the following evening to the pine plantation, and sang to himself—

"Come to the sunset tree,"

and felt in the breast-pocket of his coat for the last copy of verses and sat down to watch the narrow hedge-path, the vicarage chimneys, and the declining sun simultaneously.

"She never could be such a little brute as not to come," said Sandal.

Presently he thought he saw a little spot moving over the distant fields.

"She must be a long way off, she looks so small," said the lover.

Strange to say, she did not seem much bigger when the figure drew nearer. A feeling of intense mortification and disappointment took the place of hope in the

breast of Sandal when he distinguished a boy of about ten years of age, with corduroy trowsers and shabby tweed jacket, who was stumping with heavy highlows over the tangled path with a tread, oh! how unlike the fleet foot of Myra.

Sandal was not a patient youth at the best of times, and he was rendered more irritable now from previous disappointed expectation. He strode towards the child with the idea of taking him up and shaking him. But unconscious of his fate the little victim advanced, and Sandal perceived a parcel under his arm, tied up in white paper, and sealed with red sealing-wax. That heavenly girl, no doubt, being unable to come, had appointed another place of meeting. He held out his hand and received the parcel, which he tore open frantically in the hope of finding a note from Myra. It was her handwriting on the cover, and it was sealed with a little glass seal which he knew belonged to her.

"Is this all?" he cried, turning the paper over and over, and peeping into the pockets of the book.

"Dunnaw," said the boy; "'twas all Miss gove me."

"Can you read?"

"Eese, I can read—great A, little A, bouncing B."

Sandal was considering whether he should entrust his verses, simply folded, to the care of the young messenger. The thought that he might give those sacred stanzas to indifferent or scoffing eyes made the youth flush all over with shame—never; sooner should they

> "Like a voiceless nightingale,
> Die heart-stifled in their cell,"

that cell being his breast coat-pocket.

"Shall you see Miss Myra again?"

"Yees," replied the boy.

"When shall you see her?"

"Next Sunday, at Sunday-school, very like."

Sandal cursed him as a fool under his breath. "You won't see her this evening when you go back?"

"Naw, 'cause she gave me sixpence to bring you the book, that I mightn't go to the vicarage."

Sandal gave the boy another sixpence and told him to go home. Then he sat down and looked over his pocket-book in the half hope of finding that Myra might have put some line or some flower between the leaves. He consoled himself when he discovered none by the thought that she was far too honourable to have opened it.

Nothing more could be done that evening, he perceived, so he dismissed the boy with the present of an additional sixpence, and returned to the public-house, with more ill temper and less disposition to write love verses than on the previous night. The quantity of tobacco he smoked that evening astonished himself when he had to pay for it on the following morning.

After Myra had said good-night to Peath on the previous evening, which had the effect she had anticipated, of sending him to bed, she returned to the sitting room just as the Doctor was about to turn down the lamp and follow the example of his pupil.

"Stop a moment, papa."

"Why, my dear, it has struck ten o'clock."

"I wanted to tell you that I saw Sandal Tyne this evening."

"Sandal Tyne!" repeated her father, gazing at her with round astonished eyes.

"Yes, sir, I met him in the fields unexpectedly."

"Why has he not called? 'Tis very strange that he should not come to the house."

"I don't know exactly why, but I suspect that he thought you would disapprove of his doings, or his not-doings.

He left Cambridge without taking his degree."

"After all my trouble!"

"Yes, sir, so I thought."

"I had hoped he would have been a wrangler, if not a high one. What has he been about?"

"Oh, he has been travelling on the continent with a friend of his, a Lord Mountorrent."

"So clever as he is. 'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.'"

"Yes. He was looking very handsome, too—very much improved in appearance."

"He will not remain hanging about in this neighbourhood?"

"I think not. He talked of going to London. He spoke against Mr. Sandridge, and called him a lily-livered fellow."

The Doctor could hardly repress a smile, for the epithet suggested the remainder of the speech, "Where got'st thou that goose look?" Peath had a decidedly

goosish appearance from his length of neck, and general whiteness and flatness of head; but he said no more, except—

"Well, the sooner he goes the better. Can he be staying in the neighbourhood with any of the gentry or farmers?"

"No, he is at the public-house,"

"Poor fellow!" said the kind-hearted Doctor, full of pity, thinking how loathsome such a locality would be to himself.

"Oh, papa, I don't think he can mind it much. He is not bound to remain, you know. He left an old pocket-book here, and wished me to give it to him in the field to-morrow evening where I met him."

"Send it to the public-house by Colin."

"Perhaps he was fearful of its not being safe if he were not there when it arrived. I will send it by little Billy to the place where he asked me to meet him. Probably he will expect me."

"You will not write to him, my dear?"

"Oh no, papa," said Myra. And having

acquitted her conscience by telling all she had done and meant to do, she thought she might omit repeating the praises of her beauty, which she loved to linger over in her memory. Sandal was the first man who had confirmed her suspicions on that point, and she liked the confirmation.

Peath longed to possess that sketch of Myra, though he had the idea that a previous pupil had executed it. His suspicions that she had met some gentleman in the fields on the previous evening made him unusually pre-occupied at his studies, and consequently more than ever stupid. Myra was resigned first, and then grew irritable, and snapped at the poor fellow in a savage manner. His face flushed, and he grew more and more confused, tumbling tenses one over another, and confusing numbers, persons, and cases. Myra pushed her chair away from the table in despair.

"*What* are you thinking of, Mr.

Sandridge? I never knew you so very careless before."

"I am not careless—only—only you are impatient to be off and meet that gentleman in the fields, whom you met last night," cried Peath, with an explosion of boiling wrath.

Myra was sobered immediately.

"I am not going to walk out this afternoon beyond the garden, Mr. Sandridge; but if it suited me to do so I should, without consulting your opinion, for I consider I have a right to meet any one I choose."

There was a dead silence, broken by a hasty tap of knuckles on the study door, and in walked Sandal Tyne. Myra blushed deeply, and rose from her seat.

"Pray do not let me disturb so comfortable an arrangement," he said, with furious sarcasm in his tone, as he glanced at the book in juxtaposition showing that Mr. Sandridge and Miss Leith's studies had been simultaneous. "I am going to Lon-

don to-night, and I thought I would just look in and say good-bye and how do you do at the same moment to the Doctor."

"He is not within," said Myra.

A point which Sandal had ascertained before he entered the house. He felt his heart swelling as if it would burst at being in the place where he had passed many happy and innocent hours in the prosecution of studies in which he then made great progress, and had felt the pleasure of present success and the hope of future honour as their reward. That his own acts had nipped these fair prospects in the bud did not decrease his unhappiness. He saw another man older than himself sitting in the seat which he had occupied for months, and he could hardly bring himself to return with distant politeness the bow which Peath made, when in a scared manner Myra named the gentlemen to each other.

"The old room looks much as it did

two years ago," he said hurriedly. "Any additions to your library, Miss Leith, since I resided with the Doctor?"

"None—none, I think. Oh yes; but they are only second hand, bought at a book-stall by my father. There is an edition which he values very much, tattered though it be, of Boethius' 'Consolations of Philosophy,' and Drew's treatise 'On the Being and Attributes of God.'"

"This knowledge is too excellent; I cannot attain unto it," said the youth, putting back Drew's book which he had taken down.

"People can generally attain to what they wish, if they really do wish it," said Myra sententiously, repeating one of the Doctor's sayings.

But Sandal believing it to be original, took it for encouragement to persevere in his pursuit of Myra.

"Probably you sometimes need the 'Consolations of Philosophy,' Miss Leith?" he

said, with an insolent smile and a half glance at Peath, who luckily did not perceive it. "I hope you may find it in this book." And he placed within the leaves his verses and a letter to Myra, returned the volume to its place, then with a hurried bow to Mr. Sandridge, who made a stately pretence of rising from his feet to return it, and a fervent pressure on Myra's hand, he left the house.

CHAPTER V.

"There was no tone of any voice,
No chirp of any bird,
But the beating of her own heart
Was all the sound she heard."

MYRA was troubled. She did not like his going away so abruptly. She felt she had been cross to him when they last met, and she could not make it up before *that* Mr. Sandridge, as she called him in her mind. She wondered what Sandal meant about "Consolations of Philosophy." Only an insolent sneer at Peath, probably. She had not seen Sandal deposit anything between the leaves; and though she fancied that there was a peculiar meaning in the look of the young man, she believed it arose only from the rage he felt in seeing that

"Liddell and Scott" was on the table, close to Mr. Sandridge, and that he could not turn over the book and tear the portrait of Myra from the fly-leaf, where it made a most inappropriate frontispiece. Peath had been tempted by the proximity of the book and the charm of Myra's beauty to sketch it on the sheet of paper that came nearest.

Had Myra read the packet her lot in life might have been different. It contained the following letter and some verses.

"MYRA,

"I write because I am half frantic at not seeing you alone. I dare say that infernal fool Sandridge, with his pig's eyes, is now enjoying your society. I love you, darling girl! Will you marry me? I have money enough for us both. Your father would soon get over his objection to me, if any should exist. I have a plan which would assure us both fame and wealth if

you assisted me to carry it out. I speak of the present. Perhaps some future day wealth and lands may be my portion without any effort on my part. I shall remain a week at the address I give below. After that, if you do not write to me, my course will be devious, my future a blank.

"Dearest Myra, give one word of hope to your devoted

"SANDAL."

On the following evening Myra walked to the fir grove, and sat down, watching the clouds and the sky; but all was less bright than usual. The sun sank within a bank of clouds, and the girl shivered. She wondered why she watched the narrow path up the field. Truly, could Sandal have been conscious of it, he would have felt avenged for the broken tryst; but he had gone, as he said he should, to London, being weary of the sign of the "Three Pipes and Porter Pot,"

and the fare he there obtained. There we will leave him, waiting for an answer to a letter which had never been received.

His absence was a source of gratification to others besides Peath. It was strange that any sympathy should exist between the Honourable Mr. Sandridge and Bill Gravel, the rat-catcher, and Giles Stoke, the poacher; but so it was. Steerly, the stockman, was only glad to get the young swell's place by the fire, but the other two had plans to discuss too which the young *ci-devant* pupil of Doctor Leith might naturally have been averse, and the completion of which he might have tried to prevent.

Peath was relieved when he heard that the handsome young ne'er-do-weel was going away. The Gospel according to Saint Mark went on quite swimmingly when that dreadful impediment to study had been removed. He was terribly in love with Myra, and it seemed to him that

he could never pass his ordination examination without her going up with him and remaining with her father at the inn, while he was shut into that fearful room in the Bishop's palace, where young men stare at the walls and at each other blankly, and are placed with appropriate quires of foolscap and goose quills before them, whilst the ogreish examining chaplain walks up and down with sharp eyes and quick ears, to detect any cheering word of whispered information or pencilled sentence slipt across to help a floundering brother candidate.

"Could I not," suggested Peath, "put a little—a *very* small Greek Testament, in my pocket? It might be *such* a help."

"Better not," replied Myra. "I've heard that it would be certainly detected; and then the examiner would be more strict than ever. You see, you would be giving yourself an ill name, and the result would be hanging, probably."

"Surely I may write some dates on my starched wristbands—creation of the world, and all that?"

Myra looked puzzled. "I really do not know what you will be expected to say on that point. You see, divines have treated this world of ours as partial friends treat ladies of uncertain age. They have sworn that she is quite young—a miss in her teens, in fact, but some curious folks have dug up registers that tell a different story—so very different, that really, Peath, I cannot say what you had better give as a date. You had better take the Doctor's advice."

Peath had not understood any part of the girl's playful speech but the last piece of advice, which he took, and applied to Dr. Leith.

"You had better give the old orthodox story, four thousand years—that will be the safest," was the placid teacher's advice.

Peath went up for ordination. The Bishop was acquainted with the Earl of

Arras, and "tempered the wind to the shorn lamb." He told his chaplain that there were circumstances where a pious well-disposed young man, of blameless life, and good old Tory principles and excellent connections, would weigh with him heavier in the balance than a cleverer mind unbacked by those advantages.

Peath with some others was congratulated by the chaplain on having passed his examination so successfully. He went back to the hotel and was shaken by the hand very cordially by his late tutor, who said that he supposed that their intercourse would now cease, on which Peath's face became the colour of a piece of salmon in season, instead of its ordinary pale tint.

The Doctor liked Mr. Sandridge. It was such a comfort to have a young man in his house who drank but one glass of wine daily, and never touched beer, who abominated short pipes and even the best "Regalia" cigars, who was always glad to

go to bed at ten o'clock, and never displaced the Doctor's newspaper. The dull edge of his stupidity it had been Myra's duty to sharpen. For love of her father, she had taken care that Peath's lessons should be perfectly learned before they were taken to Doctor Leith for repetition. Altogether, the Doctor said truly, on shaking hands with Peath, that he had never had a pupil whom he liked so well.

Peath, when his salmon-coloured flush had faded, said that he had left several articles at the curacy of Birchwood, and with the Doctor's permission he should like to spend a few days with him as a *guest*. He was pretty certain that his father would not continue to pay the Doctor for his board and tuition now that he had become the Rev. Peath Sandridge.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ante tubam trepidat."

PEATH was proud of his having passed his examination. He wanted to go home and produce an effect before his family. He was, poor fellow, weak enough to think that his father, his elder brother, Lord Lyrate, and his sister, the Lady Indamire, would be all impressed in different degrees by his having entered the Church. He did not know how soon, when one bird has flown from, or been pushed out of the parental nest, the rest of the nestlings occupy the space that the truant left vacant, swelling themselves out and broadening their wings, and resenting any effort made on his return to resume his vacated rights.

Peath stayed in town long enough to have a card engraved—"The Revd. Peath Sandridge." He gloated over the name. Never had any effort of the engraver's art seemed to him to possess an aspect so charming as this arrangement of letters. He had been thrown away in the army. In a country rectory he should be the centre of an admiring circle of parishioners. They would hang on his sentences when uttered from the pulpit. That reminded him that he would take some lessons in elocution, and he sought out a master whose style had all the charm of novelty to recommend it.

Then Peath arrived at the castle. He could not help in the pride of his heart sending one of his cards by the valet to his father.

"Oh," said the Earl indifferently, laying it down. "Let Mr. Sandridge's old room be prepared for him, and tell the butcher there will be one more to dine to-day."

This was Peath's welcome home. Lady Indamire stuck out a cold cheek. The Sandridge family never could kiss each other without contrivance. They had such long noses, that they had been taught caution by successive failures. It was not pleasant to find the bridge of your relative's driven against your cheek in an effort to reach her cold thin lips. So they applied themselves to their mutual greetings fairly and softly, and the result was a salute cautiously administered and cold beyond parallel.

"So you are japanned, Peath," was his elder brother's observation.

Peath looked a little hurt. He was the Reverend Peath Sandridge now, and his reverence ought not to be spoken of in a manner so scoffing. Lyrate was in high good humour, and Indamire, to whose side Peath retreated in the drawing-room, told him the reason in strict confidence. He had proposed to Lady Iris, daughter of

the Marquis of Fenshire, and had been accepted. The wedding was to come off immediately.

"Is she beautiful?" asked Peath, thinking of Myra.

"N-no, not that," said the Lady Indamire; "but very distinguished, and exceedingly rich."

Peath thought of his beautiful love, with her hands embrowned by potato digging and absence of gloves, and sighed. He meant to ask his father's consent to marry Myra when he found a suitable opportunity. Perhaps, as the Earl would be very happy in the match made by his eldest son, he might permit his younger one to be so himself in his own way. His heart beat fast when he walked into the peer's library for the requested interview. Lord Arras was an older edition of his son—the same fair skin, hooked nose, flat narrow head, and narrow lips. Also the same refinement of the extremities,

the same graceful figure, rather too narrow and champagne-bottled at the shoulder for beauty, certainly so for manly strength.

"'Tis not quite so bad as the Bishop's chaplain," thought Peath, "for my father cannot compel me to give her up, and I a clergyman of the Church of England and a quarter of a century in age." So he felt belligerent, and disposed to settle the matter as soon as possible.

The Earl leaned back in his arm-chair, and rested the back of his neatly-trimmed grey head against the morocco, and said,

"You've something to say, Peath. Debts, eh?"

"No, sir, I have been living very quietly. I have no debts."

"Lucky that. I have no money to spare. I shall be obliged to do something for Lyrate on his marriage. Indamire told you, I suppose?"

"I am very glad to hear it. I am convinced," said the young man, warming into

enthusiasm, "that no man can be really happy till he is married to a woman he loves."

"Ump!" said the Earl. "Men who have lived and loved, and married their loves, are seldom enthusiastic at the memory of their past happiness. They found that—

> 'It softened from its high celestial flavour
> Down to a very homely household savour.'"

But his Lordship was no more of a conjurer than his son, and he had no idea of the blow that Peath was preparing for him.

"I am, as I said, glad that Lyrate's portion is to fall in such pleasant places. Father, I wish to marry myself."

"You!" cried the Earl.

"Certainly," replied Peath.

"I do not know the lady to whom you have been addressing yourself, but I hope she has money, as I have none to give you," said the Earl.

"It would hardly be fair, would it, sir,

for me to expect money when I can settle none on my wife?" replied Peath, with *finesse* born of love.

"Then better not marry at all. Your vicarage will bring you in four hundred and eighty-five pounds a-year, I understand. That may feed you, but it would starve a family."

"My life would be a very lonely one in a remote vicarage without a wife, sir. The lady I wish to marry has not a penny; but she is the daughter of a poor man, and will not shrink from poverty shared with *me*," said Peath grandly.

"And pray who may be this disinterested fair one?" asked the Earl with a sneer.

"She is the daughter of Doctor Leith, my tutor," replied his son.

"Soh! They've taken you in to marry the daughter. The old story! I thought there was nothing but a child there, or I should never have consented to your going to him."

"She was only fifteen years old and a few months when I first resided at Doctor Leith's, but I have lived there two years—very happy years altogether, except having to read so hard."

"Taken in!" repeated Lord Arras, going on with his own thoughts.

"My Lord," said Peath, "so little have I been 'taken in,' as you call it, that I am uncertain whether Miss Leith will or will not accept me, and I am convinced that Doctor Leith has no idea of my attachment, as he proposed that I should not return to the curacy after my ordination."

"You spoke just now of the young lady being willing to share poverty with you. How do you account for that, if you have not settled matters with her?"

"I spoke according to my wishes, my hopes—I have no certainty—and because she is accustomed to poverty."

"Well! what is your motive in applying to me?"

"To obtain my father's consent to my marriage with Miss Leith."

"I suppose you will marry whether I consent or no?" said the peer, in a surly tone.

"I have not contemplated an alternative so painful as that you would forbid my marriage with Miss Leith; and pardon me if I say that, provided I am content to live on what my living produces without applying to you, sir, you could hardly be so—so cruel as to refuse your consent to a man of my age. I am no longer a boy, recollect."

"It's all very well," cried his father, in a tone of disgust; "but when you are weighed down by a load of children and of debt—they are synonymous—you will certainly appeal to me for assistance, and I tell you plainly you will get none."

"*Absit omen*," said Peath, smiling, and glad to air a solitary bit of Latin. "Perhaps we may have no progeny."

"Certain to have an army of martyrs," returned the father. "Poor clergymen seem determined to revenge the injuries inflicted on them by poverty, by inflicting in return on the world a host of intolerably disagreeable children, all too healthy to be gotten rid of, except by a railway accident."

"I may believe, then," my Lord, "that you do not forbid my marriage with Miss Leith?"

"Do as you please. I wash my hands of the consequences. Only do not look to me for assistance when you get into difficulties."

"No, sir," cried Peath, quite cheerfully, at what he considered a consent, however unwillingly extorted. "But I am not sure she will accept me," he continued, in a more subdued tone.

Lord Arras gave a grunt of incredulity. "As if it were possible," he said, "that any one should refuse a Sandridge."

He thought no family could equal the perfection of his own, and had therefore married his cousin, who resembled him.

And Peath was fussily comforted. He was comforted because his father had assured him that he would not be refused. He was fussy at the thought that he should have to tell Myra that he loved her, and scarcely knew how to do so. Ought he to apply first to Doctor Leith? He did not know. He should feel so silly if he did so, and Myra refused him after all. He would be guided by circumstances, and circumstances guided him in a way which he did not anticipate.

CHAPTER VII.

"Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
Ruthful to hear."

Doctor Leith could not afford to have his small amount of stipend placed in the county bank. It would not have been worth the while of the partners to give him a cheque-book, and allow him to draw out his forty pounds, paid half yearly, in driblets of five pounds at a time. He was accustomed to call on his rector on the day when that gentleman received his tithes, and take the forty pounds in gold or notes, which he brought home and placed in an old-fashioned bureau with a slanting top, which locked up, and when opened formed a desk on which he wrote, and revealed

various little drawers and pigeon holes, in one of which, called a secret drawer, he kept his money. As the worthy doctor went openly to this secret drawer whenever he paid Colin, his yokel, every Friday night, the man standing in the room to receive his ten shillings a-week, it may be imagined that there was not much mystery about the place where the money was deposited. The Doctor had an opinion that no one would rob *him*—every one knew how poor he was. He was a good pedestrian, and thought nothing of an eighteen miles' walk. His rector, with whom he was on friendly terms, was always glad to give him a dinner and a bed after his arrival, and on the following day he returned home.

After these expeditions Myra and Susan always contrived to have a nice supper, and a glass of hot spirits and water to comfort the old man after his exertions; and the preparation for his return, and the

anticipated pleasure of the evening meal, so unusually luxurious, filled both the women with gladness. Peath's room, too, was thoroughly cleaned and put to rights whilst he was at the castle. Myra had heard with satisfaction that he had got through his examination creditably, and rejoiced at the fruits of her long and patient tuition.

The end of October had brought earlier twilight and whirling autumn leaves.

The evening was chilly, and Myra had lighted a fire in the library—the first of the season, in itself a treat—where the preparations for the evening meal had been made. She looked round the room with satisfaction, as the flames darted up the chimney and threw a red glow on the old brown backs of the books and the oak panels of the walls. The bright copper kettle stood on a rest before the bars, and having sung its hissing hum without release from its position, now began to spurt out hot water

and dance its lid up and down impatiently —but her father did not come.

Doctor Leith was not home at six o'clock, and Myra was confronted by Susan's reproachful eyes when she wandered listlessly into the kitchen, as folks stray about here and there who are uneasy at the non-arrival of one whom they expect.

"'Twill be dried up to a cinder, miss," she said, pointing to a chicken which was twirling round before the fire, and which Susan was striving to preserve from the prophesied fate, by a double allowance of basting.

"The Doctor *must* be here presently," said Myra, pretending to be cheerful. Then asking Susan whether she could not put the fowl a little further back, she went out to see if her father's stalwart form could be seen coming along the darkening road. After peering into the shadows till her eyes ached, she thought she would go

just a little way on the road to meet him —only just to that nearest corner. She told herself it would not take her very far from home. When the corner was turned, she could perceive nothing of the vigorous gait, shovel hat, and twirling stick of the old man. She was growing desperate now. There was no one but Susan at home. The man would have gone back to his cottage, from which nothing could keep him after the magic hour of six, which meant a plateful of smoking potatoes for his dinner. Had he resided nearer, Myra would have fetched him from home and begged him to accompany her along the road to meet her father.

Her disposition was naturally cheerful and light-hearted, but this evening she felt sinking into depression as a watcher by a sick-bed sinks into sleep, and starting up by an effort, she told herself that her father had taken the same path for the last eighteen years without let, hindrance, or

molestation, and there was nothing but the circumstance of his being two hours later than usual to make her uneasy. His friend and rector might have needed his presence for some reason to her unknown. There was really nothing to worry about, and she was a fool. This was her ultimate conclusion.

A few evenings subsequent to Peath's departure to be ordained and to visit his father, Bill Gravel the rat-catcher and Giles Stoke, the man who carried about tapes, needles, ribbons, and laces, ostensibly by day, but was a poacher by night, sat together by the fire at the public-house of the "Three Pipes and Porter Pot." The hour for closing arrived, and they left with the others, but by an understood arrangement with Mrs. Withey, the publican's wife, who was to stay up to nurse her sick husband, they were allowed to return, and sit by the glowing embers in the enjoyment of another pot of porter each, with

which the woman served them before she went up to sit by the invalid.

Giles threw on a few pieces of dried wood to make a blaze, and stretched his fingers towards the cheering warmth.

"'Tain't so cold, neither," said his companion, speaking in answer to the action, though nothing was said.

"'Twas puddling in the lake in the moonlight after them darned pike. I got eight, and hid 'um till to-morrow, when I shall take them to the fishmonger."

"How can you get them?"

"A dozen willow wands with string to the ends on 'um, and hooks to the end on 'um; set bait on 'um—nobody notices; how should they? Only an old woman at the Hall, and another old woman in the Park—only got half an eye between them. Ah!" he continued, with melancholy rapture, "what a place those coverts is for game, to be sure! The hares and partridges and pheasants I've bagged there

o' nights, nobody could tell but me and the London salesman."

"Well!" replied Bill, "they don't belong to nobody in particular. I wonder the game ain't all cleared off o' nights."

"It would be, neighbour. But you see there's covers all round, and when the gentry shoots on their own lands, off fly the long tails, and get into chancery, they say, where nobody can touch them—that is, nobody but Giles Stoke," and the man chuckled hoarsely.

"Ah! you was well brought up to the work. I've heerd that when you was quite a little chap, yur mother used to send ye out to run down all the neighbours' ducks and chickens round—you'd be as quick as a greyhound—twist their little necks in a twinkling, and bring them to dame to put in a poy!"

"Yes, yes; no one can say but that I had good broughting up. Lor! 'tis a pretty sight to go in the moonlight into the

woods, and see the birds all asleep, and no keepers. Chancery takes care, but Chancery goes to sleep seemingly."

"I suppose you make a pretty penny?" observed Bill Gravel enviously.

"Well, 'tis slow coming. Sometimes I get a large order for them gents what want to seem grand, and to give a fine *battue*, as they call it when the great folks come to see them. Then I have to fill hampers and hampers of them with live pheasants. The keepers go over and get them by the mail train, and turn them out o' night to be shot by the gents in the morning. Lor, 'tis poor fun, I should think, to stand still and listen to the cok-cok-cok of the beaters as they frighten the poor stiff things whose legs are cramped by the strings I tied them with, and who don't well know where they are. 'Taint half the fun for the gentry to shoot in the day as 'tis for the poacher to steal o' nights. 'Twould be just as good fun to go to a farm-yard to shoot all

the old women's cocks and hens and ducks.

"I'm very short," said Bill Gravel, ominously.

"You ain't tall," said his prosaic companion; "but you are strong in the legs and across the shoulders."

"'Tain't that way I mean, but I am short of money. What's become of all the rats I can't think. Do you know, that Doctor Leith is too sharp by half; but I will be revenged on him. He told Maister Cornkraike that when I had killed all his rats, and got tuppence apiece for 'em, I took 'um away and brought them all out again next day, to be paid over again. Colin Cornkraike is wonderful simple. I met him with a sack on his back. 'Where are you going with that sack, and whatever have you got in it?' says I. Says Colin, 'Master have told me to go and fling the rats into the river, where you can't get them.' Did you ever know such a fool in

woods, and see the birds all asleep, and no keepers. Chancery takes care, but Chancery goes to sleep seemingly."

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"No, no, Giles, not kill him—only stun him. One good blow at the back of the neck would do it."

"Hush! There's that darned woman a-coming to turn us out. Just walk along with me towards my home—'tain't more than a quarter of a mile longer, and 'tis lonesome passing that old churchyard. The last time I went by after it struck twelve o'clock I saw a dreadful black face a-grinning at me behind a tombstone. It made me shiver like."

Myra walked on till the landscape was lost in shadow, and she was obliged to trust to her ears to give her notice of any approaching footsteps. She stopped, and held her breath to listen. At first she could distinguish nothing but the rustling of the branches, as the breeze passed over them. She waited till it had died in the distance, and became again intent. Oh, if she might hear the well-known steady tread of her father's feet; but there was

nothing like it in the air, and, instead, an ominous rustling of branches, not made by any night wind, but by some solid body. She peered through the darkness, and distinguished something blacker than night crouched in the ditch by the side of the road. She was standing still when she perceived it. Cold horror crept through her veins. The appearance seemed a confirmation to the terrors and anxieties she had felt for her father's safety. A man or two men were waiting to rob him. It was known that he would walk home, and bring with him his half-yearly stipend. All the suspicions that had haunted her as the day drew to a close were realized. She was in a light gingham dress, and must be observed by the man or men. She thought there must be two, from the dark mass against the hedge. A terrible thought flashed across her. Had the murderer struck down her poor father and drawn his body into the hedge, to rifle

it? She turned faint and sick at the idea. Then she determined to satisfy herself by close attention. With her brain reeling with agitation, she compelled herself to watch that side of the road. She did so for a minute, and was satisfied that two pairs of eyes were watching her. Her first feeling was thankfulness. Her father then was not lying there a lifeless confused mass!

But he might be so in the next few minutes. She could not protect that dear reverend head any more than the miserable daughter of Archbishop Sharpe could save her father from ruffians. Her strength would count as nothing in warding off the blows of two men.

There was yet a chance if she acted at once on the idea which she caught at in the extremity of her distress—she must either go back, and, by alarming Susan, obtain the aid of Colin Cornkraike to return with her, or she must pass close to those terrible footpads, who might strike her down and

murder her preparatory to the murder of her father. Yet this must be risked. If she wished to save him, there was no time for fetching assistance; in the next few minutes the unconscious traveller might walk into the ambush and meet his doom. She was resolved, therefore, to dare the danger, and tying the handkerchief more tightly under her chin, and gathering the skirt of her dress round her as if seized with a sudden idea, she stepped briskly forward, looking straight onward over the dark road, as if she were going to meet the Doctor. She passed them.

Will whispered, "We shall have two to tackle now."

"No, she won't go far, or if they come back together, we can soon settle that slip of a girl so that she won't tell no tales."

When Myra had gone a few steps onward, and, as she believed, left her most urgent peril behind her, she began to totter in her gait, and stopped, because she could

not breathe easily. A few minutes restored her, and she ran forward, quickened by the dread lest the men should change their minds and pursue her.

How far over that dim road was she to pass? Alas! she knew not. The roadside grew full of terrors for her. Innocent old oak-trees, adding a deeper shadow to the hedgerow, became in her eyes watchful murderers. The shivering aspen gave what seemed to her whispers of warning. A bramble caught the folds of her petticoat, and detained her, and she scarcely repressed a scream, from her excited nervousness, in the belief that a hand had caught firm hold of her dress to prevent her progress.

The necessity for stopping to drag her clothes away from the tenacious blackberry branch enabled her to hear a distant sound in front. It was so soon lost again, that she believed herself to have been mistaken, and walked on. Then she fancied she heard it again, and stopping to listen, she

distinguished the click made by a horse's shoe on the flints in the road. Then there was the whirr of distant wheels, and Myra thanked Heaven in her heart that she was not alone in the road with those two pair of murderous eyes.

She walked as fast as she could towards the sound, when it stopped before she could reach it, at a turning down into another road. Then she heard a cheery "good night" in a voice that seemed to be her father's, and then his heavy tread on the road, and nearer still she saw his figure twirling his cudgel as usual over his head against the dim grey sky, and Myra, though not given to crying, rushed forward and welcomed him with outstretched and clasping arms, and a flood of tears.

"Why, Myra, silly girl! what are you crying about?"

"Oh, papa," cried the girl, "you are so late!"

"My dear, I chafed the skin off my

heel in my walk yesterday. Farmer Hodgson dined and slept at the rectory to go over the glebe next day with my friend Belvoir, so he said if I waited he would give me a lift home. He kindly came two miles out of his way to put me down at my nearest point; but what are you turning and twisting me about for? That is not the way home."

"Yes, 'tis one way, father. Dear father, I want you to come this way. It is no more than a quarter of a mile round."

"A quarter of a mile for a man with a sore heel, Myra, is a good deal. Let us get home as fast as we can. I am as hungry as a hunter. I dare say you have something for supper better than usual."

"Father, you used to indulge me when I was a child, I implore you to do so now on this point. I will be obedient to you the next thing you ask of me, however disagreeable it may be."

"My dear, how you do pull and haul

me about ! My best coat, too. Why won't you let me go home the right way ?"

"Why, papa, there is some animal—something in the hedge that frightens me."

"My dear, I did not think you were such a fool. 'Tis some little donkey like yourself. I'll go and drive it away."

"For the love of Heaven !" cried Myra, "for the love that you bore my mother, do please me in this, papa !"

"Well, well ! your mother governed me when we were young, and you do the same now I am old, only you'll have to nurse me with a bad foot."

They turned down a lane which took them to the vicarage house, ten minutes later than if they had passed the lurking ruffians, who were waiting to rob the Doctor. Myra dragged on her father, and did not feel safe till she had got him into his cosy parlour, and shut the window, shutters, and doors.

"There !" said Susan, with a soured

countenance, "the potatoes are all fallen to pieces, and so would the fowl, too, if you give it a shake, sir. 'Tis a sin to spoil good food by not being in time for dinner."

"'Twas Miss Myra's fault, Susan. She felt inclined for a pleasant walk, and made me go round about with her. But I must put on my slippers before I can enjoy the dinner. I am more tired than I need be this evening. I suppose I forgot that each half year I get older and less able to walk thirty-six miles in two days."

CHAPTER VIII.

"And the mysterious sense of coming ill,
Which often whispers to the haunted breast."
Mrs. Hemans.

THE tea-dinner was discussed and the table cleared, when Doctor Leith drew to the fire, and placing his feet on the fender, looked into the glowing recesses of the embers, as if he were striving to follow them into a "Hall of Eblis."

He seemed indeed very thoughtful, if not sad, and as Myra, sitting on a hassock at his feet, was exhausted by the anxieties she had suffered in the night-walk she had taken, both were for a short space silent.

At length the Doctor spoke—

"So you were very anxious about me, little girl, were you?"

"Oh yes, papa! I went on, involuntarily repeating the words addressed by the poor Countess of Denbigh to the Duke of Buckingham, when he could never know her anxiety—'I will pray for your happy return, which I look at with a great cloud hanging over my head, too heavy for my poor heart to bear without torment; but I hope the great God of heaven will bless you.' And He did bless you, my father," she added, throwing her arm fondly over his knee, and looking lovingly up into his face. "Oh, father," she continued, clinging to him, "what would be my life without you?"

"What, indeed, my poor child!" said the father, thoughtfully. "Myra, I had a strange dream last night. You know, my dear, that wiser men than I have thought they saw in dreams a foreshadowing of events to come. Thus, for one instance, the learned French Minister, Chamier, was asked whether he was about to preach

at Montauban that day, and replied that he had been told in a dream the night before that on the morrow he should rest. Before night a cannon-ball, on which there was the letter 'C' marked, slew him. I think not much of dreams, my dear child, but they may sometimes lead one to think on subjects which must be grappled with some time or other."

"Tell me, papa."

"I dreamed that it was the eventide, and I was hurrying home to take a funeral of some person, I knew not whom. When I reached the road commanding the churchyard, I saw a procession of mourners and a crowd of silent people attending. They all moved noiselessly; at the open grave was a clergyman in canonicals and surplice, reading the service, or seeming to do so, for no sound proceeded from his voiceless lips. I joined the crowd, and asked who was about to be buried; but my tongue made no sound, and no one seemed con-

scious of my presence. Then I made my way to the side of the grave, and, looking down on the plate of the coffin, I read the name and date—Basil Leith, *ætat* 57. November, 18—"

"Oh, father!" cried Myra, "the danger is past—I trust it is past, dearest of parents. I am sure the dream was meant to warn you to be careful. Oh, papa! two men I am sure were waiting to rob and murder you in the road. That is why I entreated you to return with me by the other path."

"My dear Myra! what romancing is this? Who should try to rob me, poor as I am?"

"You are poor compared to the rich; you are rich compared to the poor when you have forty pounds in your pocket, as you had this evening. Oh, papa! I saw two men lurking in the hedge just before I got to the oak plantation. I know they meant to murder you, and

I came past them, though I was terribly frightened; and I am sure I saved you, dearest of fathers."

Doctor Leith patted her head tenderly.

"Probably you saw a couple of poor wayfarers resting after a hard day's tramping, to eat a piece or two of broken victuals, and you, in your nervous irritability, turned them into a couple of bloody-minded ruffians."

"May be," said Myra, incredulously; "but I am glad we came back the other way."

"Myra! to my dream I attach no importance, but it has made me think of what you are to do, my child, after my death. Now Sandridge is not here we can talk unrestrainedly."

"Oh, don't let us think of that! You shall not die till I am quite an old woman, and able to take care of myself."

"I may die before the week is out, and we must face the results. My dear, I have

had but one child, and when I think what a desert my life would have been without her, I cannot regret that I married your mother, who was a treasure herself, and bequeathed to me a treasure in you; but when I think that I must leave you nearly penniless in the world, I doubt whether a poor man had a right to obtain for himself such a blessing. I have worked hard, but a clergyman must have a heart of stone to see distress and not to relieve it, as far as is possible, on his small income. Then, my poor child, though I have taught you what I know, and that thoroughly, you are ignorant of all modern languages and modern accomplishments. I had no money to send you to school. Indeed, my dear, had I possessed hundreds of pounds, I do not think I could have made up my mind to part with you."

Myra was weeping, and answered only by clasping her arms round the knee next to her, on which her head rested.

"Yes, *filiola dulcissima!*

'*Thou* wilt think of mè when I am away,
Borne from the threshold, and laid in the clay,'"

he murmured, speaking in reply to the caressing action. "But I am worried about your future. I have not a single relative that I know of, and 'the poor make no new friends.' The only thing I can think you would be fitted for is an assistant in a school for little boys, before they go to public schools. A terrible state of drudgery, Myra, for a girl who might instruct præfects, præpositors, and sixth-form boys in any school. But still it would be bread and cheese. Your beauty, my child, will always bring you ill-will from woman and danger from man."

"Dearest father!" cried Myra, "you are fatigued, and see everything through a darkened glass. Let us go to bed; you will awake refreshed, and shake off this depression 'like dew-drops from a lion's mane.'"

Doctor Leath followed this advice—all the more that his chafed foot was becoming irritated by the fire; and in an hour's time the three inhabitants of the vicarage were in bed, and two of them asleep.

Bill Gravel and Giles Stoke remained listening for returning footsteps, very much after the manner of Myra, but with a different desire.

At length Giles broke out into a volley of execrations on Myra, the Doctor, Bill Gravel, and himself, for having allowed the girl to pass them, and give the alarm to her father. But for that accursed jade they should have had the forty pounds by that time, and been in bed quite comfortable with the *swag* hidden away. That the poor Doctor would have been lying senseless in the road was a part of the situation that did not trouble them in the least. Was not that old scoundrel, as they called him, sitting as cosy as might be, with his

grub before him, while they had empty pockets and no longer credit at the "Three Pipes and Porter Pot"? When a failure takes place in any plan shared by two persons, one is certain to reproach the other.

"If you hadn't overruled me," said Bill to Giles, "I'd have knocked that gal on the head before she gave tongue to the Doctor."

"More fool you," replied his companion. "If the gal had been killed, the county would have been too hot to hold us: the old man might fall down in a fit, you know. But it's only having a little patience, and we shall get it all the same."

"Where shall we go to talk? The rain is a-coming down—a few drops now—'twill be a drowning night by-and-by."

"Come to my home—my missis is out for the night—and we shall get what we want there."

When they had entered the cottage, and

had thrown a few dry sticks on the fire to warm themselves, Giles went to the old chest which held his wife's best gown, and, wrapping it up in a ragged cloth, he carried it to the public-house, and asked to leave it in pledge for a pint and a half of gin.

"You will be paid," said the man, with a grin, "afore my missis comes back. I dare not face her without her best gown in the box."

The mistress did not feel so sure on the subject, and looked at the gown, as she carried it upstairs to put it away, with an eye of future possession.

To the brains of the two men the gin only gave an agreeable stimulus. Giles gave his companion the larger share, believing that he required a larger share of determination than unassisted nature had bestowed on him.

"How do you know where the old man keeps his money?" asked Bill.

"'Tis in the old bureau. I watched one evening when Cornkraike went for his wages."

"But how did you get in?"

"I went to the kitchen door and asked the maid if she had any rabbit-skins to sell, and that gave me an excuse to go across the bit of grass behind the old apple trees. The fire was blazing up, and I seed the old gentleman sitting in his chair, when Colin Cornkraike knocked at the door. The Doctor turned his head and said something, then he went to the old bureau and took out some money, and shut it agin; and I got away just afore he came out agin with his week's wages."

"I wish we had some of it here," said Bill; "your missis hasn't got another Sunday gown, have she?"

"No, no; we must do a job before we get any more brass, or brass's worth."

Then Giles showed his companion the tools with which he expected to be able

to force the window shutter and get in to the Doctor's library.

"You see, he'll be tired, and sleep sound, and we shall get off without seeing any one."

But for all that Giles loaded a pistol to take with him, "in case of accidents," he said.

The night was unusually wild with wind and rain. Myra heard it beating against the casement, which rattled as if impatient hands were striving to open it. She went to the window and flung it open to look out into the night, but was driven back by the volume of water that splashed in her face from the dripping eaves. She shivered, and, undressing, she knelt by her bedside to thank Heaven for the protection accorded to her father and herself that day, and to entreat for the care of Almighty Providence during the hours of darkness, and of helpless sleep. Then she placed her head on her pillow, and

closed her eyes to sleep; but no sooner did slumber destroy her command over her thoughts than the gloomy high road was represented to her by memory. Again she listened for familiar footsteps, and heard the ominous rustle of the branches, and saw from the shadowed ditch the sinister gleam of watching eyes.

At length she slept; but it was only to repeat her night walk with circumstances of added terror. She fancied that she was rooted to the earth, and could not fly nor cry out to warn her father, whom she saw advancing into the ambush prepared for his destruction.

The effort to scream at length awakened her, and she started up, scarcely conscious where she was, till the warmth and softness of her bed reassured her. They had been in peril, but now they were in safety; and she smiled and thanked God for her father's deliverance, and lay down again to sleep. This time her senses refused to

give up their watchfulness. Every now and then the gust of the storm shook the old chimneys, which seemed to act as rockers to a cradle, and threaten to level the ancient building.

As Myra's head rested on her pillow she fancied that she heard a dull sound in the room below that which she occupied. She sat up and listened, but it was inaudible, and she believed that it was fancy. When her head again rested on the pillow she was conscious of the same indescribable noise, which was like nothing she had ever heard before. She pushed the pillow and bolster aside impatiently, and placed her head on the woodwork of the bedstead. At first she heard nothing. Then she felt sure some one was trying to break into the library, below her room. This conviction made her heart beat louder than anything else she could hear. She must awaken her father—that poor tired old man—or he might be murdered in his bed. The

thought of his presaging dread stabbed her breast with added terror. She was filled with anxiety lest he should hear the noise, and, coming out without warning, be shot or struck down by the murderers. Those ruffians who had lingered in the hedge for his return now were on his threshold with the same deadly determination. "If they would but take all in the house, and then go!" It occurred to her to run to her father's room, and, going inside, to lock the door. Susan was not likely to come down, nor to be disturbed. She slept up a back staircase over the kitchen. Myra could not get to her without going down into the midst of the peril, and she could yield no assistance if summoned. It was an old rambling house, and the bedroom occupied by the Doctor was at the end of a passage. Myra fled along its extent in darkness, with the lucifers and a candle in her hand, and finding the door unbolted, as she had anticipated, she went

in and locked it on the inside. The room was in darkness, and no blind before the windows, excepting the crimson foliage on the outside of the Virginian creeper. The wind tossed the branches about from the window, and then against it. The rain streamed off the glass, and in the storm of the elements Myra saw a head slowly rising outside the casement to look in at the sleeper. She hesitated.

"Father!" she cried hurriedly. "Father, awake! They are breaking into the house to rob you, father. Awake, for the love of Heaven!"

"What is it, Myra?" cried the Doctor, awaking suddenly, and somewhat scared.

"Father," she said, in a low voice, "what is it best to do? There is a face now looking at us from that window. Move softly, that he does not see it."

The Doctor, fully aroused and very angry at the impertinence of any one trying to break into *his* house, saw the

head, which disappeared at the stir made by the Doctor in starting out of bed. He pulled on his clothes hurriedly, without saying a word to his trembling daughter, stuck his feet into his slippers, and seizing the poker, went towards the door.

"Do not go down, papa. They will murder you. Oh, I implore you to stay here in safety! What matters the money, if you are not hurt?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Myra. Am I to lie here, and have my house broken into by scoundrels, and take no steps to prevent it?"

"Oh, father!" cried Myra, in desperation, catching up any mental argument she could remember, "think of the Testament —'If a man smite thee on one cheek.'"

"Fiddle-de-dee!" cried the Doctor. "'Tis all very well. 'If any man sue thee at law, and take away thy coat—' Very true; but this is against the law. And say what you will, Myra," he

continued, shaking her off as she hung on his arm, to prevent his unlocking the door, "I will go down and fight those d—d rascals."

This, the first oath Myra had ever heard her father utter, had the effect that a blow would have had on her face. "He is gone, and I must follow," was her feeling.

The Doctor left his slippers on the landing, lest their flap, flap on the stairs might betray him. The house-breakers might have arms, he thought, and he had only the poker, so his chance of success depended on his finding them unprepared for his approach. So he crept down stealthily, unconscious that Myra was following him, and reached the library door, which was closed and fastened on the inside. There was a light in the room, and the Doctor heard the crack made by the bursting of the woodwork of his bureau, as the chisel was used to force it open. He gave a vigorous

push with his shoulder against the door, which drove it open.

Bill Gravel, who had been set to guard it, having his curiosity too much excited by the expectation of seeing the gold to be revealed by Giles' exertions, was driven ignominiously from his post, and the Doctor, not seeing his enemy, rushed, as he was behind the suddenly opened door, at Giles as he stood with his back towards him—a dark object, before a light, by which he worked, and swinging his poker against the back of Giles' head, felled him, face forward, in a sprawling mass against the bureau. Then Myra heard the report of a pistol which Giles had given to Bill, to use against any interruption. The house-breaker, seeing his companion fall, and lighted by the candle to a sight of his assailant, who hearing a noise turned towards him, fearful of sharing Giles' fate, fired at the Doctor, and escaped out of the window.

"Oh, papa, are you hurt?" Myra exclaimed.

"Nothing, my dear," said the Doctor, who had staggered to a seat. "Better awaken Susan, to call for help. Something must be done with this fellow on the ground. He may only be stunned, and awake up to mischief again."

Bill had escaped out of the window, but it was still open.

"He may come back. I do not like to leave you, father."

"Shut the window, then, as well as you can, and call Susan."

The lamp they had used in the evening was still on the table, and Myra lighted it, and took the candle to awaken the maid-servant. When she returned she saw blood on the side of her father's shirt under the shoulder.

"You had better go to bed, sir," she said, with her teeth chattering with terror and anxiety.

"I will, my dear, when I have secured this fellow with Susan's clothes-line. I am not much hurt."

When Susan came, shaking and weeping, her master sent her for a rope to tie the arms of the wounded man; but he gave up the intention when he saw how deathlike was his countenance, as Susan lifted the face and laid it down again.

"I believe bed is the best place for me, Myra, my child," said the Doctor. "Send Colin Cornkraike to fetch the nearest surgeon. Tell him to say what has happened, that he may be prepared."

They all left the room, locking the door. No one cared to face even the possibility of the house-breaker's coming out to join the family circle. If he recovered sufficiently to escape out of window, he was welcome, but it seemed unlikely. The Doctor went upstairs, leaning more heavily on the balustrade than was his wont. He got into bed softly, and lay down painfully.

"Myra," he said, "the dream!"

"Oh, father, it cannot come true; you told me you were not much hurt. There's not a great deal of blood."

"Aye, aye, a scratch—a scratch—marry, 'tis enough," said the Doctor with a faint smile. "'Tis not so deep as a well or so wide as a church door, but will serve to fulfil the dream, Myra."

Myra stood with a trembling lip and white face. She had only her flannel petticoat tied on over her night-clothes, and was shaking with nervous apprehension.

"Go and dress, my dear, and when you have done that, light the kitchen fire and get me a hot bottle for my feet."

The Doctor did not want a hot bottle particularly, but he knew that occupation is the best remedy for anxiety.

When Myra came up with the hot bottle, half an hour later, the cold grey dawn was creeping over the room, and gave its livid tint to her father's face.

"I've tried to do my duty," muttered the Doctor. "I don't know that anything is left to the last, except that Soame's widow wished me to speak to the guardians on Monday next about increasing her pay. If you were but provided for!" he continued, turning his wistful eyes on his daughter's face, as she was covering his feet carefully after the application of the hot bottle.

"Father, I mean you to get well, and provide for me," Myra replied cheerfully.

Her father answered not—he did not feel so hopeful. A man with a bullet in his body might be excused for not seeing circumstances in a rosy light.

Daylight crept on; that ghastly heap was polluting the library with its presence. Susan sat by the kitchen fire weeping, with her apron thrown over her head; and Myra's senses were strained to hear the sound of distant wheels, which were to bring the surgeon, whose verdict would

probably condemn her to despair, or brighten her cheeks with the flush of hope. At length they were heard. She looked at her father.

"You had better go down, my dear, and tell him how it happened. I cannot talk much."

Myra went down, and at the bottom of the stairs she met Peath, but not the doctor. The disappointment unhinged her. She turned her face aside, and burst into tears.

"This is very horrible," said Peath, taking her listless hand, and leading her into what she called the drawing-room, in contradistinction to the library, where they usually lived.

"I am so shocked—so distressed. I thought the surgeon was come," sobbed Myra, to account for her unwelcoming reception.

Peath continued to hold the hand he had taken. Myra's weeping face was

covered with her handkerchief. Peath longed to put his arm round her; but he was too timid. It seemed ungenerous to take any advantage of her distress.

"May I go up and see him?" he asked, and without waiting for an answer, he went to the bedroom of his tutor, of which the door was ajar, and stepped softly to the bedside, where he lay with livid features, and his hands, gripped together with pain, lying outside on the sheet.

"I am so grieved, sir," began the young man.

"Ah, Sandridge, you come?"

"Yes. 'Tis a bad business. I hope the surgeon will be here immediately, Doctor, and will relieve our anxiety as to your state."

There was a long silence. Peath knew not what to say, and to the Doctor speaking was irksome.

At length the sound of a vehicle was heard, followed by a footstep in the hall

below. The surgeon came up, followed by his partner, and Peath left the room to allow the gentlemen to make their examination. In about twenty minutes the elder party came downstairs, followed by his companion, and was met by Myra, whose lips formed words which she wished to utter, but from them proceeded no sound.

"My dear young lady," said Mr. Buckingham, "do you know if your father has settled his affairs? We have not yet extracted the bullet, but the probe has shown us that it is deeply seated. If anything has to be done, it should be done quickly. Doctor Leith may sink under the operation of extracting the bullet."

Whilst the surgeon was speaking, Peath had stolen up again to the bedside of the patient. He had heard the beginning of the speech, and longed to obtain from his tutor the sanction to his addresses to Myra, but he knew not how to frame his

request to a man so painfully occupied by his sufferings. It seemed a sacrilege to talk of love and marriage to one on the banks of the dark river.

Peath's voice faltered when he asked, "Can I do anything for you, sir? Anything in the world I could do, would be such a relief to what I feel in seeing your suffering."

"No, my dear Sandridge, there is nothing that can be done. I have left nothing to this dim twilight hour which I could do when it was light except my daughter." He groaned, and turned uneasily on his bed. "She will be friendless at my death—and poor Susan. If you could show them any little act of civility or kindness."

"I will do anything," murmured Peath. "If Myra would consent to become my wife, I should be so happy—so glad. I shall not have much. I asked my father. He will not give me more than the value

of the living, four hundred and eighty pounds a-year."

Doctor Leith looked up astonished at the speaker.

"She is too young!" he said at length.

Fathers have that delusion about young ladies sometimes.

"She is seventeen," replied Peath—"quite old!" he cried eagerly.

The Doctor smiled faintly, but his countenance expressed infinite relief.

Myra entered the room, with her face discoloured by weeping; she came to her father's bedside, and kissed his bald forehead with passion and tenderness. Peath withdrew from motives of delicacy. Myra might have to exchange the last words with her father, which she might now hear him utter.

"Myra," said he, "that young man loves you. If you could like him well enough to marry him, I should die without anxiety as to your future welfare. 'Tis the only

thing that troubles me now. Do not anwer if it distresses you."

"I do not think it is true," replied the girl. "You must mistake. He never told me so."

"He has just now asked me leave to address you. He has no vices—no bad habits; but I will not urge you, my dear—and here are the surgeons."

Myra felt as if they were coming as executioners of her father. If he should die, it should not be with any added pang on her account She went back and kissed him tenderly.

"Father," she said, "I have no dislike to Peath. I will marry him, if it will make you happier—more easy, I mean."

Her father pressed her hand. He was a brave man, but he rather shrunk from the torture to which he was about to be subjected, of which his mind was then full. The surgeons led Myra to the door and shut it after her.

"I hope in a short time to tell you that we have extracted the bullet safely, my dear young lady. Be of good cheer."

This injunction seemed a mockery to the weeping girl, who went to her room, and who knelt down by the side of her bed, meaning to pray, but she could form no words in her mind, but "Save my father! Oh, Almighty power! save him. Soften his bodily agony—give peace to his trembling spirit." She was silent, listening painfully, lest she should hear a groan proceeding from the bed-chamber; but her father repressed all expressions of suffering —first, because he was an Englishman, and proud of endurance; secondly, because he thought it likely his girl would be listening.

After waiting for twenty minutes, she became terrified at the silence. The doctor might have gone away without speaking to her. They might be unable to extract the bullet, and might consider

the matter hopeless, and dislike to let her know the inevitable result. She went into the passage which led to her father's bedroom; but his door was still closed. She put her ear to the keyhole, and heard a word or two occasionally uttered by the surgeons. Then she came away with the heart-sickness of hope deferred. Peath was leaning against the balustrade of the stairs, and in the irritability of her feelings she felt that it would have been a relief to slap his face. That face looked full of pity for her, and she felt that she hated to be pitied. She was going to turn back to the refuge of her bed-chamber, when a slight noise in her father's room made her stand open-lipped, and scarce breathing. The door opened, and Mr. Buckingham came out with a cheerful face.

"The ball is extracted, Miss Leith, and we have every hope that your father may do well. We trust that he may sleep a little. Nature has been much exhausted

by all he has undergone. Should there be much pain, you may give the draught which will be made up; and now we had better see whether the house-breaker is alive or dead. He must not remain here under any circumstances."

"May I go to papa?"

"Certainly—only you know that your father's life depends on quiet."

"Should he not have some breakfast?"

And being answered in the affirmative, Myra directed Susan to bring a cup of tea and some dry toast to the door of the room, for she grudged being a moment absent from it.

Poor Peath wandered about disconsolately downstairs, till Susan remembered that he had probably not had his morning meal either, and she took such care of him as nice quiet young men who pay well generally receive from middle-aged servants.

Myra, too anxious to feel hungry, sat

watching her father till he slept quietly. If he did not become feverish he would do well, they told her. She watched the rising and the sinking of the bed-clothes that covered his shoulder till her head grew giddy with the observation. Doctor Leith was a man in the full vigour of health, and exceedingly temperate. He had, the doctors had told her, every chance of getting well, if no malign influence counteracted the efforts of nature to produce convalescence.

As hours passed away, and the Doctor remained quiet, Myra leant her head against the bedside and slept for an hour, awaking so hungry with the wolfish appetite of healthy seventeen, that she was fully convinced that her father must be better. And so she stole away downstairs, and opening the sitting-room door, she saw Peath sitting down to a savoury dish of Irish stew. She looked daggers at him, and cutting herself a large lump of bread

without saying a word, she retreated with it again to her father's bedside, with the air of an angry martyr. This flurried poor Peath so much, that he, feeling that he had no right to enjoy a dish of Irish stew when the father of his possible wife might be dying, lost all desire for full two minutes to help himself a second time. But nature will have its course, and the smell of Irish stew, especially when the appetite is still rebellious, is difficult to resist. So Peath succumbed, and had his fill, and then drew his chair to the fire (which Susan had given him for company, poor young man) and warmed himself, with looks askance at Liddell and Scott, Ainsworth, and Calmut's History, looming in the distant shelves. They were vanquished enemies of which he never again desired to see more than the backs, and he drank the health of the bishop's examining chaplain in a glass of the Doctor's very small beer.

Then he hoped Myra would come down again soon, and felt kindly anxious to know how the Doctor progressed. He had been very strenuous for him in his exertions to prevent any noise being made in the removal of Giles Stoke from the sitting-room. He was carried to his cottage, more dead than alive, to be nursed by the mother who had, by her early training, done her best to provide a candidate for the gallows. By her and some besides the Doctor was considered a bloody-minded villain for the free use he had made of his hands in resisting the robbery of his bureau.

"Serve the old stingy curmudgeon right," they said, when they heard he was in a dying state, and Susan and his daughter distracted with grief.

Susan had worked off as much of her anxiety as she could in washing the well-worn carpet from the pollution it had suffered from the inroad of the burglars.

The bureau was only partially broken open, and Peath pressed the sloping cover back to its place, and sealed it down with his own coat-of-arms, lest the Doctor, if he recovered, should fancy any of his papers had been disturbed. That pellucid-minded old gentleman had no secrets of his own nor of any one else, and, excepting the money, there was nothing valuable concealed within that old walnut wood receptacle, unless it were a poetical translation of the "Tragedies of Æschylus," unfinished, on which the Doctor employed loving labour, but which he was too modest to show to any one but his daughter.

This worthy man aroused himself at length from his slumbers, and had half forgotten why he was lying in bed in broad daylight, till he found a dull pain and tight bandages a reason for remaining there. However, he patted Myra's face, and pulled her hair to awaken her into com-

panionship, and then begged piteously for something to eat. He was ready to argue eagerly that nature, to repair any damage to the structure of the human frame, required support, and that the desire shown by his stomach for food proved that food was required.

Myra wisely thought that her patient would be more disturbed by contradiction than benefited by starvation, so she gave him some broth and bread.

When tea-time came he sent her down to make it. He did not allude to Peath, but he thought it rather hard that the young man should not have a chance of pleading his cause if he wished it.

CHAPTER IX.

"Scorn me not, Chloe, me, whose faith well-tried
Long years approve, and honest passions guide;
My hopeless soul no fond affections move,
But chaste simplicity and modest love."

MYRA went down more placably disposed to the young clergyman than she had been. In the first place, she had slept, and this got rid of a great part of her irritability of brain; in the second, her father seemed to be going on so well, that a considerable part of her anxiety was relieved. Mr. Buckingham was to come again in the evening; and though she felt she should be glad to have her opinion confirmed, she was not very eager for the visit. She felt a little amused curiosity at the idea of Peath as a lover—her first lover! She

knew nothing of love but from books, and her books being generally in the dead languages, the heroes therein described were not lovers like men who walked about the world in coats and waistcoats in the present day. She quite agreed with one of the boys, who had expressed his opinion that "Æneas was a d—d sneak," but, as she told him, she feared he had not met that fate, as he went to the infernal regions and returned safely. The boy said that he only wished he had had the thrashing of him, when Æneas was in the lower form. Myra thought not much either of Achilles, who was evidently greatly relieved from the dilemma in which he had been placed—the determination of the Greeks to sacrifice Iphigenia, by her willingness to suffer. He did as much as he was compelled in providing a loop-hole for her at the last moment; but Myra felt that, had she been in the place of that hapless virgin, she would have pre-

ferred death to the acceptance of succour from one who offered it so coldly.

The marvellous knowledge of human nature shown by Achilles in his offer to carry off his bride at the last moment, should her courage fail, as he observes it frequently does at the point of death, did not strike a girl of seventeen. Achilles must have had two touches of mortal to one immortal in him to have conceived anything so natural. However, she was to take tea with a man not likely to be an Æneas, or an Achilles, and who would require to be helped to tea, and bread-and-butter, or dry toast, as a quiet young man would, who had dined at one o'clock on an Irish stew.

"The Doctor is going on well, I hope?" asked Peath timidly.

"Quite well. 'Tis such a happiness," replied the girl.

"You must have suffered dreadful anxiety?" observed Peath.

"Yes," said the girl, becoming grave at the recollection.

"I do so wish I had come last evening; I should have done so, only I lost the train."

"I am sure I wish you had. You might have walked with me," replied the girl. She said no more, for the truth should not be told at all times; but she thought "I should not have been half so frightened, if I had had a companion; and if he had been sleeping in the house, he might have been shot instead of papa."

Myra had said enough to encourage her companion, when she paused abruptly. His face crimsoned with pleasure. He would have edged his chair nearer, to take hold of her hand, but for two reasons. He was sitting at the side of the table next to her right side, and her fingers were busy grasping the handle of the tea-pot to pour herself out a cup of tea, whilst his fingers were greasy by contact with a piece of

bread-and-butter which he ate in the intervals of his talk. That slice being disposed of, he drank some tea, to give himself courage.

"Nothing under the present anxious circumstances could give me such satisfaction, such happiness, as the thought that you would have preferred my being near you in the hours of your distress."

"It is not quite that, Mr. Sandridge; but you see, if you had been here, this dreadful occurrence would probably never have taken place. They would not have ventured——"

"I should think not, indeed!" Peath blustered out. "They would never have attacked the house had I been in it."

"No, probably not," returned Myra, thinking two men better than one.

This seemed rather a cold assent, but Peath was too much agitated to draw fine distinctions.

Poor Peath! he was feeling—"I should

so like to tell her I love her, but how can I do that when she tells me to hand the kettle ?"

Myra did not like strong tea, and had asked Peath to fill up her cup.

Peath did so, trembling all over like Paolo, but he did not accomplish his intentions as successfully as the Italian lover, for his shaking hand misdirected the spout, and directed the stream of hot water over Myra's hand.

She cried out, and rushed to the cold-water tap in the kitchen, leaving Peath standing motionless with the teapot in his hand, as if he were waiting for her to come back and receive a second libation. There was a step, and he looked towards the door. It was Susan only.

" If you please, sir, Miss Myra says you're to go on with your tea, for she is going to have some scraped potato on her hand, and it takes a wonderful time to scrape potato when the burn is a large one."

"I am so sorry," murmured poor Peath.

"Well, sir, 'twas awkward, to be sure. But you didn't go to do it, I dare say. It might have been wus only the kettle wasn't quite on the boil."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"No, my dear young gentleman. Only just finish your tea, for I shall be glad to get the teapot when it's done with."

When Myra's hand had been tied up in a potato poultice, she went back to her father's bedside, and speculated whether she was bound to marry any one so awkward as Peath—every throb and feeling of heat in her glowing fingers made her angry with him. After sitting still a long time by her father's side, his curiosity prevailed over the remembrance of his doctor's injunctions to keep quiet.

"Has Peath said anything, my dear?"

"No, papa. But he has done a great deal," replied the girl.

"What has he done?" inquired the

Doctor, wonder-stricken at the passing suspicion that poor Peath could be audacious.

Myra held up her poulticed hand, with a comic mixture of anger and amusement in her face.

"What is that?" cried the father, regarding what looked like a boxer's glove, from its size and roundness.

"Peath was going to give me some hot water in my teacup, and in his eagerness poured it over my hand. Perhaps he took me for one of the gods; but I never heard of a libation of boiling water."

"Then he said nothing of his intentions?"

"My dear father, I was satisfied with his performance, and ran off to the cold-water tap in the kitchen."

"Ah! he will do better next time," said the sick man, wearily.

"Will he, papa? He could hardly have done worse. But you must not talk. I dare-

say Peath will improve by-and-by. He seemed rather afraid of me this morning."

She sat till the twilight came on, and then, hearing the sound of carriage wheels, she knew that Mr. Buckingham was come, and left the room to allow of his seeing the patient alone.

Going into the library, she saw Peath, sitting by the fireless grate without candles,—the picture of depression and dreariness. The weather was not cold, but a drizzling rain had clouded the landscape, and hastened the twilight.

"Oh, you look so dismal," she said, coming behind him up to his chair.

He caught hold of the arm nearest to him, and drew her to his side.

"Take care," cried Myra, smiling. "Do not try to seize the wrong hand—you have managed to leave me only one available."

"Oh, I am so grieved, Myra! Will you forgive me? I cannot let you go till you say 'yes.'"

His arm slipped round her waist now.

"Yes, yes, I forgive you. Let me go." And she disengaged herself, and taking the lucifers from the corner of the chimney-piece, she lighted the fire, and then, sitting back on her heels, she watched the blaze which threw its warm light on her beautiful face and youthful figure."

"At what are you smiling?" asked Peath, for the girl was laughing silently with eyes downcast demurely.

"Oh, bosh. Only at a fairy tale—nothing of any consequence."

"Don't say bosh, Myra."

"I will," she answered viciously. The story which amused her—for she was in the nervous state, that might break into laughter or tears at any moment—was brought to her remembrance by the shadow of Peath's nose thrown on the wall, increased to a gigantic size.

As the charming little volumes in which it appeared have been swept away by the

lapse of years, I may as well state that the story was of a Prince who was born with so large a nose, that no one could look on it without astonishment. He thought each one with a nasal organ of smaller dimensions was an object of commiseration—"My figure is the proper height," said Queen Elizabeth, hearing Murray say that Mary Stuart was taller. "My nose is the proper size. Each one else has an inferior one."

At length the Prince lost his attendants in hunting, and, wandering about, came to a grated window, through which he saw the loveliest girl in the world, with a delicate nose, decidedly small, and a little "tip-tilted." She came and placed her rosy lips near the grating, and the Prince essayed to kiss her; but do what he would, he could not get his face sufficiently near—this nose was ever in the way of his success. In the fairy tale he exclaims, "Oh, that my nose were

a smaller one!" and the wish produced the alteration.

Myra, with ears on the alert for the step of the surgeon on the stairs, had a half thought that Peath was not unlikely to kiss her—she supposed people did kiss the ladies to whom they offered themselves—and then came the thought of that peaked nose, so exaggerated in the shadow.

"Myra," Peath said, with his voice trembling, "will you be my dear wife?"

He sat quite still, and looked very anxiously in her face. She did not answer.

"I shall be very wretched if you say no,' Myra, because you see I have been happier since I knew you than I have ever been since my mother died. I was the youngest, and she was fond of me; no one has cared for me since, much. I shall be a poor man. I have no wealth to tempt you. Could you like me, Myra?"

"I don't dislike you," said the candid

young lady; and in the words of Slender she was going to say, "If there is not much love at first, it may decrease on better acquaintance, and out of familiarity may arise contempt;" but she knew Peath would not understand the quotation, and would be offended by its seeming levity.

She grew grave now at once, for she detected a step overhead in the passage. In a moment she was on her feet and flying to meet Mr. Buckingham.

"How is my father, sir?"

"No one can be going on better, Miss Leith. Some one should remain in his room to-night, in case he requires anything. Have you had your house better secured against invasion?"

Myra had not thought it necessary. One man was incapable, she supposed, and the other would scarcely make the attempt again after such a failure.

"The police are on his track, I understand," said Mr. Buckingham. "You

will have to give evidence against him, if you were present, as I understand from Doctor Leith was the case."

Myra looked very grave at this. "How is Giles Stoke?" she inquired.

"He is alive still, but insensible," returned the doctor.

"I have no fear now Mr. Sandridge has returned," said the young lady.

"Doctor Leith," observed the surgeon, "is much distressed that two of his congregation should have conspired to rob and murder him. I remember his sending for me many years ago because this Bill Gravel, a child then, was choking from inflammation of the lungs. Your father sat up with him all night, supporting his head on his breast, whilst the boy's parents slept. And this is his return."

"Perhaps," said Myra, "the boy never knew it; or, if he did—

'Vows made in pain
Ease will recant as violent and void,'

for they forget when they get well—even grown people. Probably being nursed is felt to be a derogatory state."

The surgeon smiled. "I hope patients do not find being doctored a derogatory state, and owe me a grudge besides a Christmas bill for all my trouble. But, my dear young lady, your father, I trust, will get well rapidly if he gets over the next three days without any unfavourable symptom."

"How would unfavourable symptoms show themselves?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"Never mind, my dear; let us hope he will go on all right. If he does not, your young friend here will come and fetch me; but I do not anticipate anything of the kind."

He drove off, and Myra, without thinking of Peath, and with her head full of bad symptoms, was going upstairs, when he stopped her.

"Myra, speak one word. Let it be 'yes.'"

She was darting from him impatiently, but she chanced to catch his eyes, and saw that they were full of tears.

"Dear Peath," she said, holding up her pretty mouth to kiss him as innocently as might a little child, "I will do my best to be a good wife to you, only you must wait till papa gets well."

CHAPTER X.

"Tender handed stroke a nettle,
And it stings you for your pains."

DOCTOR LEITH pondered over the attack on him. He reproached himself needlessly for want of care of his parishioners. He mused on his stolen hours of dalliance with Helen, Medea, Iphigenia, and Antigone, when he ought to have been inflicting amateur flogging on little boys for not repeating their commandments. He repented of the exquisite pleasure he had felt in fitting the music of his own cultured language to that melody of tongues which has ceased to vibrate through air to men's senses—which is called dead, but which lives in the love

of the erudite. That he had narrowly escaped death by the hand of the youth whom in childhood he had saved from suffocating disease, did not seem to him a balance for the wrong he fancied he had done him by permitting him to drift into sin. The fact that the men were after the culprit, and would be sure to overtake him sooner or later, gave the Doctor, instead of the satisfaction the speakers anticipated, uneasy concern. He would be tried; not hanged, probably—unless he, the Doctor, died—but transported for life.

This sentence, which would have given the culprit only a vague idea of seeing pleasant new countries, and being able to escape and lead a bold existence in bush, gave to the worthy clergyman the picture of increased moral degradation and physical misery. He remembered the boy in the Sunday school, William Gravel, a good-looking fellow, and clever, but very idle and impudent. "My surgeon

told me," said the Doctor to himself, "when they were grubbing for the bullet and could not grasp it, that they never gave up the hope of saving the patient's life. Shall a minister of Christ give up the hope of saving an immortal soul?" But for the present he was helpless—things must take their course till he was better. To make any exertion now would bring on inflammation, he was told, and even if he lay still he might die of lock-jaw any day.

CHAPTER XI.

"Angels listen when she's speaking,
She's my delight, all mankind's wonder;
But my jealous heart would break
Should we live one day asunder."

Rochester.

PEATH sat by the fire when Myra left him, and warmed his indolent feet, and was as happy as a man could be in this mortal state, having gotten over his examinations, and obtained the promise of a beautiful girl to marry him. Moreover, he was to be in a few days a beneficed clergyman, and felt all the dignity of the position. He was so happy, that he could afford to be uneasy about the state of the good Doctor — a gentle anxiety which young folks feel about men of fifty, whom

they consider to have reached the very verge of human life. Poor dear Doctor! Peath felt he should be sorry if he died. To be sure, he spoke very sharply sometimes, when he heard a false quantity in Latin, which always had the effect of making him jump from his seat, and walk quickly up and down the room, to get rid of his irritation. But Myra? So long as Myra was left to Peath, he should feel earth to be as heaven. A few days afterwards, Peath received an invitation to go to the castle on the Thursday of the following week, and assist the Bishop of Dulchester in the solemnization of the marriage of his brother, Lord Lyrate and Lady Iris. He was rather more proud of this than Myra approved. She was already jealous of those high-born and high-bred relatives.

Peath had been at a public school till he went into the army, but from Myra he had learnt the first rudiments of education. It would be incredible, were it not of every-

day occurrence, that young men should pass so many years at our finest public schools, and be utterly ignorant of spelling, punctuation, composition, and writing a respectable hand. In such common subjects of information boys are supposed to be well instructed when they enter the career of their public school life. The result is that they fulfil the Portuguese proverb with regard to the University—

> "*Burro vai à Santarem,*
> *Burro vai e burro veu.*"
> "An ass to Santarem may go,
> And going an ass, he'll come back so."

No tiresome examination was required of the youth, when, fired by martial ardour, he went into the Lancers. He had not been a mark for matchmaking mothers, because it was known that law and inclination gave everything to the Earl's eldest son, Lord Lyrate. The Earl would be glad when Peath could be inducted in his living, after which he should wash his hands of him, he declared. He

wanted all his income to do credit to the marriage of his eldest son, with the high-bred daughter of the Marquis of Fenshire, the Lady Iris Lilymere. Lord Arras would willingly have omitted inviting his second son to the wedding, but this was a proceeding too outrageous to be more than thought of. Peath existed. That was the whole of his offence in the eyes of his father. He had never run in debt, nor got drunk, nor gamed, nor broken any of the commandments. He was simply nobody. He appeared at the wedding, but at weddings wedding garments in the present day mean a handsome gift to the bride or bridegroom, and Lord Arras groaned over the twenty guineas he had to disburse for Peath's small offering at the shrine of the Lady Iris.

When this had been clasped on the fair round arm of the bride, Peath made a little speech, which Myra had taught him. She had also written one for him to return

thanks for the bridesmaids, as his brother's best man.

The wedding took place in the country, where such tiresome customs still hold sway. Peath delivered a clever playful speech with just enough of timidity and hesitation to give the idea that it was unpremeditated. His father and brother were astonished, whilst the rest of the company thought 'twas a pity that Lord Lyrate did not possess the intellect of his younger brother. Peath went to his room that night with the happy consciousness of success. He connected it very quietly with Myra. Myra had found out his hidden genius. She was a girl of such wonderful penetration! He was far happier at the curacy, with the old Doctor and Myra, than with these smart folks, who did not care for him. He looked at the string of bridesmaids contemptuously. There was not one of them, he thought, to be compared to Myra,

who had looked like an angel, from her dark flowing hair, when she turned her face suddenly on him, being interrupted in her occupation of digging potatoes.

So before he returned to the curacy he wrote thus to his father, preferring this mode of communication to speaking, sending the letter by the butler.

"My dear Father,

"I am about to unite myself, as I have already informed you, with the daughter of my tutor, Doctor Leith, and as I shall not draw on your Lordship for any funds after I have been inducted to my living, I hope you will not refuse me your consent and your blessing, as I ask for nothing else.

"Your dutiful son,

"Peath Sandridge."

The answer to this was as follows, the butler being told to wait for it :—

"DEAR PEATH,

"Do as you please. If you choose to knock your head against a brick wall, no one can prevent it.

"Your affectionate father,

"ARRAS."

"I'll run my head against a brick wall, then," said Peath. "I see my father does not mean to give me more than the proceeds of my income, any way. I may as well marry Myra and be happy."

His face, which had been drawn and worried by anxiety, softened at this determination. He pondered over the old tutor, whom he meant to make his father-in-law, and decided that he was a much better fellow than his true parent —much kinder. Fancy presented the scene which would await him at the curacy when he returned,—the old man well enough to get downstairs, sitting by the fire, reading a paper by the light

of a paraffin lamp; Myra with her face pressed against the window, watching for his coming. He would open the little gate, and by the time he reached the door, Myra would have opened it and would relieve him from his wraps, and his hat, gloves, and great coat. Then he would go in and find the kettle singing on the hob, and whilst he was warming his fingers Myra would ring the bell, that Susan might bring in the dish of steaming bacon and eggs.

All happened as his fancy had foretold.

When the tea-cups were cleared away Myra played a game of chess with her father, which was part of her evening duty; but as she decided on her moves rapidly and Doctor Leith had the caution of age, there was time for much whispered conversation between the lovers, and Peath contrived to tell Myra that there was not a woman at his father's castle who could hold a candle to her. Lady Iris

was very ordinary, and he should imagine by no means clever. He grudged the bracelet that his father had made him present to his sister-in-law, though Lord Arras paid for it. No one had offered him any wedding-cake, so he had helped himself to a large slice when no one was looking, and there it was, producing it, with a silvered orange flower on the top of it. He also produced the wedding favour.

"I wished," said poor Peath, "that I had been born first. I should have liked you to have all the costly woman's gear I saw lying on the table, which held the trousseau of her ladyship."

Myra gave him a merry glance. She felt that she should have had no chance of marrying Lord Lyrate, though she should probably attain to being the Honourable Mrs. Sandridge. She meant to marry him. Her father had again urged on her that she had better do so if she had no

particular objection, for *he* had been a curate all his life, and somehow there was no chance of sale for his poetical translation of Æschylus.

"If it were published, though it might be highly praised by the critics, not one half of them would understand the original as well as you do, Myra, so I should not be elated by their praise. To tell the truth, my dear, I lost money by printing a sermon once, and I don't think I shall ever get it back. Four hundred and ninety-five pounds a-year is not much, but 'tis better than nothing, and Mr. Sandridge is a gentleman, and has no vices. I think he is very fond of you."

"Yes, papa."

"His father will not like the match, but of course when you are his daughter-in-law you must treat him with proper respect and the duty due to him, as you will be his son's wife."

When Doctor Leith had got safely over the fourteenth day, and the wound had nearly healed, he came downstairs during Peath's absence, and not being considered at present otherwise than an invalid, he thought himself entitled to sit still with his blank sheets of paper, and build the lofty rhyme in English on the basis of Æschylus.

"Father," said Myra to him one morning, when the skies were bright, and there was nothing dim or close in the atmosphere, "the dream did not come true!"

"No, my dear; but as they say in Essex, 'Twas nigh as a toucher.' Strange, those spirits' mysteries—why I should have had a dream which seemed so to foreshadow an event which nearly took place, but did not. It is, I suppose, impossible for any one, however conscientious and anxious to do their duty, to look without a shudder on those dark regions, of which it

is said, 'Lo! that night is solitary, no joyous voice cometh within.' I am thankful to be permitted to remain in the upper air a little longer—all the more that I am not clear as to the dark unknown, nor into what state I shall emerge from the murky bondage of the tomb."

"Susan," said Myra, "told me that she had two grandmothers: one was sure in her own mind of an eternal salvation, and was content to go. She was a very starched, ill-tempered old woman, and they were not sorry when she departed. The other was a gentle, timid, good-natured old dame, who used to cry out, 'Oh, my dears! Keep me as long as you can, for where I am going when I leave this world I have no idea!' All my sympathy went with the last."

"Yes," replied her father, "naturally, because the same ideas have passed through your own mind as troubled hers. I have found in my experience that

'no thought infirm' pales the cheek of the dying who are without imagination. The present occupies them; they believe that God is merciful, and will receive them into His rest, but in what manner the translation is to take place they do not consider. Like the Russian soldiers, when the Englishman represented to them that their general was sending them to certain death, who replied, 'That is his look out, not ours.' The unimaginative Christian casts all his care on One who careth for him.

> 'The wide, the unbounded prospect lies before me,
> But shadows, clouds, and darkness rest upon it.'

These folks are happy, in that memory is generally as deficient as imagination in their brains. The numberless heart-pricks inflicted by memory on the sensitive, the pangs which come when one is bound helpless on one's bed, a prey to *insomnia*, are amongst the worst sufferings of age—

'How fleet is the glance of the mind
Compared to the speed of its flight;
The tempest itself lays behind,
And the swift-winged arrows of light.'

Some lightning flash of memory shows us past scenes of our childhood, in which we were cruelly, carelessly, or tyranically unjust. It reproduces tones of agonized entreaty, to which we were deaf during the storm of our passions, and the glances of pleading eyes, long closed in the dust of the grave, which we disregarded in the stolidity of our self-occupation. It seems strange that these whips and stings of conscience should come only to goad us to agony with the thought of our own unworthiness when the past is irrevocable."

"My father," cried Myra, "when I said to Mr. Sandal Tyne, that my tenderness for animals must have been an instinct conferred on me by the Author and Giver of all good things, he answered that it was a mistaken idea of mine, and

that I acted under the influence of a defective education, which had obscured every naturally destructive impulse in my nature. I think, sir, that you disquiet yourself in vain ; you have educated your mind to a painful sensitiveness. I never knew any one so thoughtful of others—so careless of yourself. Do you remember Mrs. Dewes, that tender, pure-minded woman, who died in such agonies of apprehension of divine vengeance for sins which from mole-hills she had in her terrors magnified into mountains? Conscience does not make cowards of us all ; it seizes on the kindest and best, on those least able to fight against its influences. To suppose that it can inflict torture, one must consider whether the surface exposed to its action is sensitive or callous."

"That is true," replied Doctor Leith. "I wonder whether the mind of that young fellow is callous to all good im-

pressions? I fear I did not attend to his training as I ought."

"Oh, papa, I think he is quite worthless."

The Doctor smiled. "Young folks are always uncharitable," he said.

CHAPTER XII.

"Who against hope believe in hope."
Romans iv. 18.

THE Doctor recovered entirely, and visited his parishioners as usual. Peath and Myra walked about as acknowledged lovers. Susan was busy hemming towels and seaming sheets for the future household of the young people.

One day Myra had gone into the village without Peath to make some purchases at the general shop, when she heard a loud shouting and saw a crowd of urchins hallooing each other on, with the hellish instinct of cruelty with which boys seem to be born, and rushing into the midst of them saw that

they were stoning a small crouching terrified dog.

I fear Myra was by no means particular in the terms with which she addressed them, and, stooping down, she took the animal in her arms, and was bitten for her pains, the creature fancying that another larger enemy was come upon him.

The boys were ashamed at first, and then the biggest said Miss "had no call" to be angry with them, for they was only a-stoning Bill Gravel's dog as shot the Doctor.

"You are all of you as bad as Bill Gravel, to torment a poor dog that never hurt you. Bill Gravel wanted to steal money, but you are cruel for the sake of being wicked, and merciless without any temptation. If the dog dies, I will have you prosecuted," continued the wrathful young lady, hoping that a word they did not understand would strike terror into their souls.

She saw a grin, however, on the faces of the two eldest, and shot the reserved arrow in her quiver with terrible effect.

"You, who have done this, shall have your names put down, and shall not have *any* hot cross buns on Good Friday."

This awful prediction struck terror into their souls. Hot cross buns from the vicarage were unlike any others made, in size and quality. Sometimes the best children received two each, and thereby carried home the materials for a feast to the brothers and sisters, too young to have the privilege of learning their catechism.

When Doctor Leith had first arrived at the curacy, he found the parish clerk had always instructed the village boys, and had taught them, as he averred, to repeat the catechism quite perfectly, taking them altogether. The plan was original, and was thus: each boy repeated one line according to the printed copy in the Prayer-book, thus when it came to the

second commandment, the boy at the top of the class started off with "Thou shalt not make to thyself any;" the next boy went on, "the likeness of anything that is——"

"Stop!" cried the Doctor, "you have left out something."

"Please, sir," said the speaker, "*graven image* is down with the measles,—that's *his* line."

The Doctor remonstrated with the clerk on the impossibility of the boys understanding such slices of learning.

But he defended himself that they could never understand anything about it, and that when each boy had a line 'twas, as they said, quite fair, and share and share alike.

"He warn't sure he understood about graven images himself. He supposed 'twas something about them things the 'talian boys carried, but they warn't grave at all, for there was women dancing like

David before the ark. He saw no use in new-fangled notions—not he. The boys learnt very well his way."

The Doctor preferred his own, but at the end of a few years the result was much the same.

There were indulgences, however, well understood by these young fry—cakes on Christmas Day and hot cross buns on Good Friday. And this gave Myra a weapon, of which she availed herself on the occasion of the dog-stoning.

Very angry and flushed, and looking more beautiful in her anger, she walked home with a throbbing heart, but with a dignified step, and carried her rescued captive into the larder, where she fed him and gave him water; and of food and fluid he partook ravenously, looking at Myra with suspicious eyes, which gradually relaxed their tension, and when she sat down he consented to curl himself up at her feet on the hearth-rug.

"So this is Bill Gravel's dog, Myra, mine enemy's dog?"

"Yes, papa. You do not grudge him food and shelter?"

"Not at all," the Doctor replied thoughtfully.

But he soon after arose and went to his bureau, and then to his bedroom. After this he sat down again opposite the dog, who still slept, whilst Myra went to consult Susan on household matters.

Presently the animal sprung up and smelt about the room distrustfully. The Doctor opened the door, and the dog rushed out, followed by Myra's father, who snatched up his hat and stick as he went in pursuit. Off the animal scoured over the fields, through gaps in hedges, far, far away, followed by the breathless clergyman.

"It is to be hoped he will slacken his speed shortly," said the curate, "or he will utterly beat me."

However, the terrier took it more easily as he got further from the village. No doubt the fear of further persecution had winged his steps.

The afternoon was advancing, and the sun with his slant rays pierced the shadows of an oak plantation, where some fine old trees had been surrounded by saplings.

"He is hidden here about, without doubt," said Doctor Leith; "but there is no shelter excepting trees. Perhaps the skulker has chosen the hiding-place of royalty, and may be looking down upon me presently."

The terrier, however, dived into the thickest part of the plantation, and presently the Doctor heard a quick bark of pleasure and recognition, and a growl from another, and inferior animal, Bill Gravel. The growl was followed by a curse, and what seemed an ineffectual kick—at least so the clergyman conjectured, as the dog gave no cry. He pushed aside the

brambles, sticky clivers, dead fern, and withered nightshade, and came on a pair of staring eyes, which glowed like coals, from the trunk of a hollow oak-tree. The kick intended for the dog had been of no avail, because the legs of Bill Gravel were much in the position of Gulliver's, when the mischievous court page stuck them into the marrowbone. If eyes ever could be interpreted, those of Bill Gravel said, like those of Lady Ann—

"Would they were basilisks, to strike thee dead."

But as he could have no hopes that they would produce that effect, he only glared at his visitor, with a rapid speculation in his mind as to whether the Doctor was the leader of a troop of constables and policemen, and what chance there would be of his dashing through them like an animal at bay, and making his escape. He was nearly tired out of his concealment, cramped by the necessities

of remaining crouched into the hollow tree, and only stealing home for food and warmth at night to the cottage of his mother. That cottage was visited frequently by the avengers of blood, namely, the police, and he dared not remain more than a short time in that shelter. He would be off, he told the old woman, if she would get him a few shillings for a start; but shillings did not grow on trees, and she had none, and few seemed inclined to employ her to earn any.

"Your dog showed me where to find you, William," said the curate.

"Yes, curse him!"

"The boys nearly stoned him to death this morning. But my daughter rescued him."

"I wish she'd a' left him alone. What do I want folks to come prying after a poor fellow like me for? I shut him up, but that darned ole woman must have let him out. I s'pose you've got the perlice

behind you?" and he raised himself a little, and peered round the stalwart form of the Doctor.

"No, I am alone," he replied.

Bill's eyes sparkled malignly.

"What do you come peeping ater me for?" he asked in a surly tone.

"If you come to that, William Gravel, what did you go peeping after me for, on a certain night, a month ago, in the hedge, along with the poor fellow whose head I broke?"

Bill looked down. He was not aware that the little episode referred to by the Doctor was known. Then he recovered himself, and began to raise himself, and prepare to get out of the tree.

"I am come to have some talk with you."

"Talk away, nobody stops yer."

"William, when you were a little child, you were very ill; I used to walk up and down with you on my shoulder for fear you would choke."

"I had as lieve you'd have let it alone," was the reply.

The Doctor looked inquiringly.

"I don't call this *livun*," said the lout, stepping out of his shelter and stretching himself, his terrors having subsided when he saw no one in the rear of his companion.

"If," said the Doctor sententiously, "you choose to become a house-breaker, and have to hide like a squirrel in a hollow tree, it is not my fault. Why did you lie in wait to try to murder me? I have never done aught but good to you."

"I don't call it good to keep a cove alive when there's nothing but want."

"You might have worked. Why did you steal?"

"'Cause I wanted the swag without work. What's the good of going on the land, and only gettin' a piece of dry bread for breakfast and dinner and a dish of taties for supper? Master and I had words along of a piece of beans he said I cut up

with my hoe. Then I took to the pedlar dodge, and the rabbits and the hares ran about so, that they was too strong for me, and I knocked them over."

"For sale?"

"Sometimes the woman cooked 'um, sometimes I sold 'um."

"Do you know what will be done with you if you are caught?"

"I shan't be hanged, if you mean that. Go over the herring pond, very like."

"And when you get there, you will be chained up like a dog—no comfort, no drink, no tobacco. Surely 'twould be better to try to be an honest man and work for your living."

"Who will take me, I should like to know?" asked Bill with a sneer. "A pretty character you would give me, wouldn't you? You've only come here after this brute of a dog, to find me out and set the perlice on me."

"That was not my intention," said Doctor Leith, quietly.

A phrase of holy writ was ringing in his ears: "Of those whom thou hast given me, have I lost not one?" The church vicar on earth must try to recall this blackened sheep and restore him to the fold. The thought and the hope softened his eyes, and relaxed the watchful fixedness with which he had hitherto regarded his opponent.

The temptation was too strong for the wild beast who stood before him in all the consciousness of well-knit five-and-twenty. The Doctor wore a silver watch. He was sure, Bill Gravel thought, to have a little money about him. Where was the use of talking about work, and being honest, and all that? He saw his way at once to getting the few shillings he required to take him to some other place, where he should be able to move about "like a Christian," instead of living

like a rat in a hole. If the Doctor was knocked on the head, he could tell no tales as to his location.

Doctor Leith saw the wild beast rising in the eyes of the young man, and as Gravel sprung on him, with the intention of garrotting him by a hand twisted in the neck-handkerchief, he, quick as light, pulled out from the breast of his coat a small loaded pistol, and presented it at Bill's forehead.

They were close together, and the man did not like the sensation of the cold ring of the pistol's bore on his brow. He stopped, arrested suddenly in his design.

"Down on your knees, you young scoundrel, or I will shoot you through the head."

The Doctor's finger was on the trigger, his countenance was stern. Bill sunk on one knee, and, seeing no relaxation in the countenance opposite him, then on the other knee.

The Doctor was somewhat breathless, from heart-beating. It had been, to use the Essex phrase, "as nigh as a toucher."

"Stay there, William Gravel!" he said firmly, and without a trace of agitation in his tone. "I shall not trust you again. Every dishonest man is a fool. It does not pay. Be honest in the future, or try to do so. I came here to be of use to you if I could. Here are two sovereigns," he continued, taking them from his waistcoat pocket with his left hand; "take them, and get to Liverpool as soon as you can. When you are there, write to me, and I will send you a post-order for five more to take you over to America, and to start you in a foreign land. Your limbs are strong; your health is good; if you show the same cleverness in honest labour that you have in wickedness, you may yet be a wealthy and respectable man. Observe this, the two sovereigns are all that you would have obtained in money had you throttled me.

The silver watch has my name engraved on the inside, and would have led to your immediate detection had you parted with it. Had you strangled and left me here in the wood, the whole country would have been raised in a hue and cry after the murderer. Here is the money. Rise, and let me see you go on before me out of this place."

Bill arose sullenly without looking at his benefactor.

"What am I to do with this d—d dog, that will be a-follering me to tell folks where I am?—a cursed brute!" he said angrily, kicking the little animal that fawned on him.

This seemed to the Doctor the worst point he had yet seen in the creature before him.

"Put the dog into my arms," he said; "he shall be well used."

He did not choose to stoop for him, lest he should be stretched on the ground

by a blow on the head from the powerful fist of his adversary.

Bill obeyed.

"Now walk off. If you take the bye-roads to W——, you will not be observed."

"And you won't send the perlice after me?" said Bill, still doubtful.

"No, I will not. Moreover, I will remain here half an hour, which will give you a fair start."

The Doctor kept his word. He was very hopeless of the future of the man he tried to assist, and busily occupied himself in efforts to prevent the struggling dog to escape and rejoin his departed master.

The curate was relieved when the half hour was over, and he could return to Myra, into whose hands he put the small animal.

"He escaped, my dear; but I have brought him back. You had better tie him up if you wish to keep him."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Poor and content is rich, and rich enough."
Shakespeare.

PEATH looked with lover-like impatience at the sewing, which seemed to him endless, of sheets, towels, and pillow-cases. Myra's deft fingers seemed in an eternal twinkle. She seemed like some girl in a fairy tale, who could not be released from thraldom till a certain task was accomplished.

When the linen was hemmed she set Peath to mark it with the initials P. M. S. He managed one dinner napkin pretty well, but made a disfiguring blot on the second, which had to be taken away and washed immediately. This misfortune recurred so often, that Myra told him to

read the leaders in the "Times" to her instead, when her father had finished the two days' old copy.

When the linen was completed a more distracting process followed.

Myra, urged on by Susan, declared that her marriage was out of the question till the house was thoroughly cleaned, from attic to cellar.

Peath groaned. So much discomfort was inflicted on the inmates by this uprooting of all usual localities. The meals were eaten in the small drawing-room whilst the dining-room carpet was taken up and beaten.

Myra did not descend quite to scrubbing the floors, but she washed the paint round the skirting, with utter disregard to the remonstrances of Peath. Then the library was to be cleaned. That was worst of all. Every book was to be taken down and dusted, and replaced on the shelves exactly from whence

it had been taken, for the Doctor liked to be able to put his finger on any favourite volume, and take it down gingerly without disturbing the others, even in the dark.

Peath could not but assist Myra when her round arms embraced as long a row of books as she could stagger under, as she made her way to the grass plot, and with brushes and dusters cleaned each book tenderly. When it was brushed it was wiped, and the finishing touches were preceded by flap, flap, flap of the covers against the body of the volume, that any stray particle of dust might be dislodged. Sometimes valuable annotations, made on the different authors by her father, written on stray half sheets, would fly out, and have to be replaced in the pages to which they had reference.

Peath determined that he would rather never see the outside or inside of a book again than consent to such drudgery.

When he married, he would have a model household, plenty of servants, and his wife should never do the work of one. This he supposed was an exceptional occasion; but it was very disagreeable, and must never happen again.

"You are tired, dear Peath," cried Myra, seeing the dusky shadow rising too plainly on his brow. "It will soon be time for tea. Go in and brush your clothes, and wash yourself. I have only this one row to finish. Such a grand day's work accomplished!" she said, looking at the re-arranged shelves with pleasure.

Peath retired, glad to be off duty, and Myra continued her flapping and dusting. Amongst other books, she now came to Boethius' "Consolations of a Philosopher." She held it up by the back and shook it as she had done the others. What was this that tumbled into her lap? A white thick packet, very different in colour from

the yellow folio in which it had lain *perdue.* It was sealed with an image of love sacrificing a rose to the god of silence, and addressed to Myra, in Sandal's well-known writing.

Myra's face flushed crimson. She took up the packet and looked about her. Susan was disappearing into the house with a duster and dusting-brush in her hand, having heard Peath's bell ring for hot water. Doctor Leith was reading the "Times" inside the open window.

There was none to see her clutch the communication and place it in her pocket. The "Consolations" was nearly the last volume in the shelf, having been the latest addition excepting "Drew," so her task was nearly concluded. It was done, and with limbs that trembled with eagerness, she ran up to her room, and, locking the door, sat down to read her first love-letter.

"Oh, Sandal! poor Sandal! He loved

When he married, he w
household, plenty of se
wife should never do a
This he supposed was
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"You are tired, dear
Myra, seeing the dusky s
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very different "Oh, Sandal! poor Sandal! He loved

Peath had not been nice at all that day. The irritation caused by the cleaning had reached its acme. If he had lasted tranquil one day longer he would have saved his credit, and passed for a sweet-tempered man.

Myra had felt inclined to forgive him till now, when having read the honeyed words of another lover, she was unusually irritated against Peath. However, she saw the necessity of assuming cheerfulness before her dear father, who seemed depressed, as she thought, at the prospect of their speedy separation, and sweeping the cobwebs from her spirits, she became as cheerful and charming as she strove to appear.

Doctor Leith was depressed, for he thought how seemingly useless had been his effort to do good. He was also fatigued, as was Peath, by his porter-like occupation of book-carrying. So they all three went to bed early, the two gen-

tlemen to sleep, the girl to read and re-read the love-letter and verses, and then weeping to bury her face in the pillow, and sob "'Tis too late! too late!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"O my love is like the red, red rose,
That's sweetly sprung in June;
O my love is like the melody,
That's sweetly played in tune."

YES, it was too late for retrospection. And Myra was now, her preparation having been completed, about to be united for life to Peath Sandridge. Doctor Leith married them in the village church, to which they walked through the vicarage garden. Peath had wished very much to make Myra a present as handsome as that which he had bestowed on Lady Iris; but he had very little money, and was obliged to content himself with a ring, which cost three guineas, for a guard ring for his wife's slender fingers. Myra thought it

was magnificent. So easy is it to satisfy a simple-minded girl. He also bought a new gown for Susan which cost more, for he was indebted to her for attendance for the space of two years.

Susan had made a cake for the occasion —a rich cake. It was pronounced by all to be excellent, excepting that the fire had rather caught it on one side, from the oven having been too fervently heated. "Nothing could be worse than a slack oven for such occasions," Susan had said. "The cake would be heavy and doughy."

Every one was satisfied with the appearance of the bride. In her white muslin frock, white chip hat, and flowing curls of rich brown glossy hue, contrasting with her delicate colour, she was as beautiful a girl as ever stood before the altar to pledge her faith to her lord. Peath looked every inch a gentleman, though rather too tall and spare looking, narrow-shouldered, and hooked nose.

They had been asked to go to the castle for a few days, at the suggestion of Lord Lyrate, who had heard an enthusiastic account of Myra's beauty from the young lord with whom Sandal had travelled abroad, and who was curious to see the girl whom Peath had selected for his wife. He had married for motives of convenience, and was quite willing to make himself agreeable to his brother's wife, and to admit her claims to good looks, even if they were superior to those of his own wife. Lord Arras expressed his indifference. He thought it might be a nuisance to have a woman with no fashion or elegance about her to be introduced to Lady Iris. But that was Lyrate's look-out; he might ask them in the name of Lord Arras if he chose.

He did choose, and Peath and Myra accepted. Peath, because he thought every one would fall down and worship his young bride metaphorically; also

because money was scarce, and it was cheaper to go to the castle than to an hotel for his wedding excursion.

Myra had a little curiosity to see the wonderful castle where her father-in-law resided, and, moreover, she had two great desires which had tormented her all her short life, and which she hoped to gratify. She had never tasted an ice, and had never touched a harp. She was very young, and the reader, who probably knows the world, may smile at her simplicity, when I confess that her heart bounded with joy at the thought of seeing Lady Iris, because she heard that the young bride played on the harp. Peath had heard it! Think of that!

"Was it very beautiful?" she asked, with a tone of awe.

"I don't know," replied Peath, in a voice of indifference. "Rather twanging, I think. I did not listen to it much. The people said 'twas very fine."

CHAPTER XV.

"Come, give us a taste of your quality."

THE young couple arrived just before dinner. It was dark, being in the month of November, and they went to their room at once to dress for it. Peath found that he had only his old room provided, and that he had not been treated with the usual dignity accorded to married men.

"I wonder where I shall sit at table?" meditated Peath. "Bachelors, when they be younger brothers, always have the sauce brought to them from which the oysters have all been fished up by the married men. Moreover, they have slip-rooms with only a stove in them, no

chimneys, and are generally ill-treated. My father might have given me a better room now I am a married man."

Probably Lord Arras wished to mark his displeasure as regarded the wife by making her feel uncomfortable: if so, the failure had been signal.

Myra, who found the room a palatial one compared to the other tiny closet which she had called her own at the curacy, thought they were very well lodged. There was a room still smaller, which had been the receptacle for disused portmanteaus and dilapidated hat-boxes, which the housekeeper cleared out, and had made sufficiently habitable to receive Peath's washing and dressing apparatus. It was her thought, for she had the feeling that Peath was generally snubbed by every one, and her sense of justice revolted thereat. She showed this by her efforts to make the poor young wife comfortable.

"She've got no lady-maid," said the *lady* who attended on Lady Iris.

"'Twould be but civil," said the housekeeper to the upper housemaid, "if you would step up and ask if you can be any use."

"Not I," said Mrs. Thorn, that functionary. "I've enough to do without troubling myself about *such rubbish as that.*"

In the mean time Myra had arranged her hair after the following fashion: she dipped her head in the basin of water, and rubbed it dry with a towel, then she shook it vigorously, to toss the curls into their proper places, and passing them round her fingers, her head was finished. Then her petticoat had to be put on, and fastened behind. She did this with her arms placed at the back of her head at the top, and then reversing the position, she caught hold of the band and hooked it. She was called by Peath

from the dressing-room, and found him with his chin in the air, and his fingers coaxing the ends of his neck-cloth.

"Myra, do just tie this for me,—you do it better than I."

A few minutes after she tapped at the dressing-room door, and said,

"One good turn deserves another, Peath. Just fasten my frock."

"How does it go?"

"Hooks."

"Oh, I can do that."

And the Honourable Peath had just accomplished this feat, when the second dinner-bell rang, and pulling on his gloves with some little trepidation, he looked at the beautiful girl at his side, and was comforted.

"Peath," said Myra, in a low voice, as they went down the brilliantly lighted staircase, "I *funk* your father."

"Don't say that, Myra."

"But I do, dear."

"Yes, so you may; but don't say so—I mean, don't say *funk*."

"But I am in a *blue funk*," said Myra, "just as Pyrrha and Deucalion might have been in when they first began to reap what they had sown, and found themselves surrounded by strange armed men and women; only they were in classical undress, and I am sure we are very decidedly dressed. I never felt so conscious of stiff muslin and a pair of pinching shoes in my life."

Nothing more was said, for the footman now flung open the drawing-room door, and announced Mr. and Mrs. Peath Sandridge.

Three persons were in the room. Lady Iris was seated on the sofa near the fire, and the Earl of Arras and Lord Lyrate stood before it on the hearth-rug.

The consciousness that Myra would want moral support all the more for the

homeliness of the slang in which she had announced her feeling on the subject gave the young man for the time a sense of dignity and self-assertion, which sat well on him.

"Lord Arras," he began, stiffly, and then, in a softer tone, "My father, allow me to present to you my wife, who, being worthy of that title, has a claim on my parent for as much affection as he feels for me."

The Earl looked on the portionless bride of his younger son, and was softened by her appearance.

"Mrs. Sandridge," said he, advancing and kissing her, "presents Queen Elizabeth's best letter of recommendation."

"I have a claim for a similar greeting, Mrs. Sandridge," said Lord Lyrate, kissing Myra also. "You are my new sister, you know."

Myra suffered the kiss, and then turned to see if Peath were occupied in

this manner with Lady Iris; but her ladyship stiffly inclined her head to Peath's bow.

"I do believe that disagreeable woman has his bracelet on too at this very moment," thought Myra; "what ingratitude!"

It was not the fact, though. Lady Iris wore one infinitely handsomer than that which poor Peath had been enabled to offer. Let good folks look the truth in the face and make the most of it. Brides do not care a straw, as a rule, for the heap of presents piled up for their acceptance. They are thinking of a thousand different circumstances which distract their attention, and remember with a kind of distaste all the pretty untruths they will have to write or to utter to the donors.

Lady Iris was dressed in costly lace over rich white satin. She was dark, and what Lord Byron describes as a "dumpy"

woman. Her eyes were good, but her skin was muddy, and her neck short. She did not rise when Myra was brought up to be introduced to her, nor speak.

"Bless me! she is like my old Chinese toy, and can only bow her head," thought the younger lady.

There was another introduction to be undergone. A tall, slim young lady in green muslin came into the room unannounced, whom Peath addressed as Indamire, as he pressed her pale cheek slightly.

"My sister—my wife," he said, and Lady Indamire put out the tips of her jewelled fingers, which were white and slender, to touch those of Myra, which were brown and ill-nurtured. Luckily their defects of colour were concealed by her kid gloves.

Myra's colour was growing rather too deep under all these agitating circumstances, being, as it were, patted on the

back in a mild sort of manner by her newly-made male relatives, and quietly snubbed by the ladies. One thing struck her with wonder. All the family seemed cut in one pattern of different sizes.

In an old cupboard at the curacy there were a set of boxes sent from India, the tribute of an Anglo-Indian pupil, of a sickly nondescript pattern, each one exactly like its neighbour and relative, but of a different size. It had been a pleasure in Myra's childish days to put them all out of sight but the largest, which contained all the smaller gradations.

The Earl was the tallest and finest looking of the gentlemen. He was bald and grey, with weak-looking projecting eyes, hooked nose, and retreating under-jaw, so that the face sloped off into the throat. He was narrow at the shoulders, and stooped at the chest. Next in size was Lord Lyrate. So like his father, that apart and at a distance they might almost

be mistaken. There was a suspicious paucity of hair on the top of the younger lord's head, which foretold what might be expected when Time should also have "bent him with his iron hand." Then her dear Peath. How much he resembled his father and brother. The sister was of the same type, very pale looking, lacking colour in eyes, lashes, brows, and hair. Yet there was a certain air of elegance and high birth in each and in all of them. Every one has felt how much even a beautiful creature has been spoilt to the eye by seeing her features expressed in other faces with less fortunate conjunctions. Myra had thought her husband good looking and gentleman-like at the curacy; but she felt disposed to say, when she saw all the hooked noses, as did the parrot at the bird show: "Lawk! what a lot of parrots."

The dinner was stately and dull. The Earl had conducted Lady Iris, Lord

Lyrate had taken Myra, and Peath strode in by the side of his sister. There was no intention of snubbing the younger son, but the conversation was an endless succession of snubs. It had reference to circumstances which had taken place in his absence, and from which he was alienated. Men generally lead the conversation when there are three of them; but in this case Peath was silent and depressed, feeling himself at home, yet not one of the home residents in consideration. The Earl talked to his eldest son about thinning out the north-west coppice; and Lord Lyrate suggested that it was a pity that a certain plantation had been cut down, which had contained some very promising trees, an observation which his father mentally resented. Then the Earl, turning to his titled daughter-in-law, asked if the Marshland woods had suffered much in the late winds.

"Oh yes, dreadfully," Lady Iris said.

"My father estimated the damage to his timber at two thousand pounds."

Lady Indamire was a lady, and wished to say something to the bright-eyed girl to whom no one spoke. Indamire was not a brilliant young lady, but she made up in her own opinion for the want of superficial accomplishments by great depth. It would have puzzled a cleverer person than Lady Indamire to find a subject of conversation with a young person so incongruously placed.

"I dare say she knows nothing—very young and ignorant, doubtless."

"Do you like Périgord pie?" she asked Myra at length, as one was placed on the table.

"I do not know; I never ate any."

"Pray allow me to put some on your plate," said her brother-in-law.

He watched her as she tasted it.

"I know how to make most pies," said the frank young bride. "Rump-steak,

pigeon, partridge—*stunners.* Oh, shouldn't I catch it from the Doctor for saying that! Slang, you know," she said, nodding familiarly at her sister-in-law.

"I imagine, then," said Lord Lyrate, "that your worthy father, Doctor Leith, did not instruct you in this modern phraseology. May I ask how you acquired it?"

"By running about over the vicarage, first with one pupil and then with another. Such fun it was!"

A dead silence fell on the company at this revelation.

The butler filled Myra's glass with sparkling Moselle. She drank it down at once, observing it was very nice *fiz.*, quite as nice as *ginger pop.*

Myra, quite unconscious of the chills she had shed over the company, proceeded to give her opinion of what she had just consumed from her plate.

"It is very nice, but what it is made of passes my conjecture."

"It is made of the livers of geese," said Lord Lyrate. "They are nailed close to a hot fire, to enlarge their livers, and then, when the geese are sufficiently diseased, they are made into pies, and we eat them."

Myra's face flushed, and her eyes sparkled with anger; but presently she smiled and said—

"Ah, Lord Lyrate, you are hoaxing me, just as the pupils used. Such cruel things cannot be done, or if they were, we English folks would never be so wicked as to buy them."

"I believe," stammered his Lordship, "that it is perfectly true."

"And you eat such food, and enjoy that which has caused such prolonged suffering? Ah! I shall never forget it, though I ate it unknowingly. It makes me sick to think of it," said the plain-spoken young lady.

Lady Indamire found she had started

an unfortunate subject. Myra's observations had made every one uncomfortable.

Peath was not quick enough to follow all she said, but he thought she looked very beautiful in her excitement.

When the dessert was placed on the table, Myra observed a cut-glass plate was placed on a china one before each person. Presently some nondescript substance was offered by the butler, of which she took part, and, tasting Vanille ice for the first time, thought that it must have been food for the gods.

"Do you think Jupiter and Venus," said Myra, addressing Lord Lyrate, who had been a little sulky since her last burst of indignation, "had anything so nice as this at their Olympian banquets?"

"I don't know," replied the young man smiling. "They may have had good ice-houses at the top of Mount Olympus. May I ask how you became acquainted with those worthy folks?" he continued.

"Oh, I've read of their doings a great deal, and not to their credit either, in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses.'"

"A queer book for a young lady to choose."

"I am sure I did not do it from choice. It was only when there was a stupid one or so amongst the pupils," here her eyes involuntarily travelled towards Peath, "and I had to coach them up, or the Doctor would have been in a fury with them, poor lads!"

"You don't mean to say you read the 'Metamorphoses' in the original?" exclaimed her companion.

"Why, you don't think I should be such a sneak as to use a *crib?*" responded Myra. "My father always said that using cribs was acting an untruth, and was conduct unbecoming a scholar and a gentleman—a lady—a girl, I meant to say."

"We all used cribs at Eton."

"Didn't Peath go to Eton?" asked

Myra, as if to satisfy her mind on some given point.

"Yes."

"Ah," she said, but nothing else; her countenance made the observation—So I should have thought. "Did you think it right?" asked the reckless young woman.

"Right?" queried the peer.

"Yes—right to cheat the masters by making them think that you knew more than you did really?"

"Upon my word, I never thought whether it was right or wrong. I did what the others did."

"Followed a multitude to evil, eh? my father would say. I am sure it has been often a good thing for papa, for after fathers have paid three hundred a-year for their sons to learn Latin and Greek from English cribs, at one of the three public schools, they are sent to him to grind away and get them a good

groundwork in mathematics and classics, if they have to go into a profession."

"I suppose you had no objection, as you seemed to have enjoyed the society of the pupils so much?" Then, thinking his observation too personal, he added hastily, "Did you like the study of the dead languages?"

"It wasn't so bad when you got used to it. The sentences always seemed at first like puzzles, and I did not know which word to take hold of first, but after the first and second were settled the others fell into their own places naturally. It wasn't half so pleasant, though, as picking gooseberries and currants for Susan, and making them into puddings and pies afterwards."

Here Lady Indamire, having eaten as much preserved Jamaica ginger as she cared for, and finished her sherry, gave the signal for retiring, and the three ladies went to the drawing-room.

"It was well she went," the Earl thought; "there was no saying what next she might have said."

Lord Lyrate smiled in thinking of his conversation with his new relative.

"Mrs. Peath," said he, addressing his brother, "is very charming—so very original and fresh."

Peath felt the implied sneer, and wished that his darling had been a little less communicative; but he was too fond of Myra to desire her otherwise. "She is worth fifty of that tallow-faced woman whom my brother has chosen," he thought, in self-comfort.

When they reached the drawing-room Lady Iris and Lady Indamire did what all women do in winter when they are alone, they went up and bent over the fire, and told each other that it was a cold evening.

They were recalled to the fact that there was an alien in the company from all their

customs, manners, and feelings, by a voice which, coming from the corner of the room, said in a tone hushed by awe—

"A real harp!"

Lady Iris looked at her companion, and Lady Indamire returned the look which said, "Can such crass ignorance exist?"

Myra had eaten ice, and had seen a harp, both in the space of a few hours. She put out her finger and touched one of the bass strings, and started at the sepulchral sound and prolonged vibration.

"Oh-h!" she cried, "how beautiful! Which of you ladies can play on it? Both, I dare say. Oh, do play! I never saw a real harp before. I should like to hear it so much."

Lady Iris, who was the performer, inclined to refuse for the present, intending to perform when the gentlemen came up; but remembering that the only stranger was her new brother-in-law, she thought

she might as well see if she were in good voice, and amuse herself a little, for she had not found Lady Indamire as enthusiastic as Myra promised to be.

"I wish she were handsomer," thought Myra, "and more like 'The Novice of Saint Dominick.'" For Myra's mother had possessed that forgotten novel, in which, years after her death, her young daughter had delighted, and it was from Miss Owenson's description of the magic sounds which the heroine drew from the harp, that Myra had nourished her longing to hear one.

Lady Iris seated herself at the harp, and preluded the accompaniment.

"Shall I sing you a long or a short song?" she asked Myra, who had attained to the dignity of being an auditor to be performed to.

"Oh, it cannot be too long," cried the girl eagerly and truthfully.

"Then it shall be—

'THE SONG OF THE LEAVES.

'Me he loved in vivid spring—
Sunshine, mist, and budding leaves;
Of my heart he was the king,
Pampered love all wrong achieves.

'Summer suns died in the west,
Fiery rays through burnished leaves,
To my bower there came a guest,
Tresses bright as golden sheaves.

'Younger, fairer, far than I;
Under the fast-fading leaves
Her he wooed so ardently—
Lover's art his will achieves.

'In the castle's grated room,
Rain and wind and whirling leaves,
Her I cast in dungeon's gloom,
Woman's hate such wrong achieves.

'In the blast he heard her cries
Swept through branches bare of leaves—
"'Tis the wintry wind that sighs."
Woman's malice thus deceives.

'Everywhere he wandered round,
O'er the dark and rotting leaves,
Where the river flags abound,
Long he seeks her, long he grieves.

'Days and months and years have fled,
Bloomed and faded endless leaves,
Love and hope alike are dead,
And the hate which all achieves.'"

"Oh-h!" sighed Myra, "that was so beautiful! I never heard anything like it."

Lady Iris thought that, though her new relative was decidedly rustic, not to say vulgar, she had good taste and great sensibility for music.

It is a fact to be noted that when two strangers are brought into a new house, they will have infinitely more toleration for each other than for the members of the family into which they have married.

"Do you play on any instrument?" Lady Iris asked Myra condescendingly.

"Nothing to speak of," said the poor girl, who had a very humble opinion of her own powers, after hearing that wonderful performance on the harp.

"But you play on some instrument, I am sure, you have such quick sensibility for sweet sounds."

"Sweet sounds—yes," replied the girl; "but I have heard dreadful ones sometimes. There was an organ at our church, and I could play on it a little, just enough to accompany the country people in their

singing the psalms. I never could manage to play with my fingers, and blow the bellows with my foot, so an old man, who was accustomed to it, always worked the bellows at the side, which is usual. One day the poor old dear was too ill to come to church, and a young farmer came up into the loft, and offered to perform in the place of the veteran. I began leading the choir as usual—

'With one consent let all the earth—'

'Quack, quack, quack, quack!' said the organ. The farmer looked round the corner of the organ, with a scared red face, thinking I had gone out of my mind. I went on in despair, singing very loud—

'To God their cheerful voices—'

'Quack!' interrupted the organ, then, with one more final emphatic 'quack,' the organ carried the day. It had flung its rider. I dared not attempt it again. I never knew before that there was any more art

in blowing the bellows of an organ than in blowing the bellows of the kitchen fire, and I've done that scores of times."

Lady Iris looked at her with eyes of mild regret. "'Tis a pity she is so vulgar," she thought; "she is very unaffected and lively, and has a sweet appreciation of other people's excellences."

When the gentlemen came upstairs, Peath found Myra standing by the side of Lady Iris, talking to her about the action of the harp's pedals, which seemed to the girl very wonderful. He was pleased at the friendly terms on which the sisters-in-law seemed to be, but by no means astonished, for was not Myra the most charming creature that ever trod the elastic turf on a spring day? Had Peath been told that his father and brother were both madly in love with his wife, he would have simply pitied them deeply. No one, in his opinion, could withstand her fascinations.

When the tea and coffee had been

handed round, Lord Arras asked Peath if he would like to play chess, whilst the others were engaged with their music or cards. Poor Peath never liked to play chess with his father, who always gave him a pawn and a knight, and invariably beat him, so he said :

"Sir, my little wife is very anxious to have the honour of being beaten at chess by my father."

"I am sure I'm not," remonstrated Myra.

"Hush! it is for me," said Peath in a whisper, and Myra slided into the seat opposite her noble father-in-law, and looked at him through her curls, somewhat in the way in which a skye-terrier reconnoitres a formidable old rat.

Peath would not have minded the humiliation of being always beaten by his father, had not Lord Arras invariably declared that Peath played so badly, that there was no satisfaction in his victory.

The poor young man, in agonies of terror and indecision, used to hesitate over his moves till he heard some well-understood signs of impatience on the part of his antagonist, understood by him but unknown to the bystanders, then in pitiable trepidation he would move something—he knew not what—and be considered even more an ass than his father had held him to be before the game began.

Peath had seen the Doctor play with Myra, and the games, conducted with the greatest gravity and eagerness, had seemed to the lover interminable. Myra won a fair number from the Doctor; but when Peath played one evening, the Doctor having been sent for to baptize a sick child, he was checkmated several times in the course of half an hour; so that believing that his wife would make a tolerable fight, he gladly used her as a sword and buckler against the redoubtable Earl.

"Which colour?" said the Earl to Myra.

"'Tis a matter of indifference to me," said the young lady.

"What shall I give you? I give your husband a knight and a pawn."

"A knight, and a bishop, and a castle, if you like to be generous; but perhaps we had better play one game on equal terms, which will enable you to gauge the excess of my want of skill, and you will know then what to allow me."

She took two pawns from the board and held them behind her.

"Left," said his Lordship, and lost the move.

Lord Lyrate wanted to make up a whist table. Lady Iris could play well, Lady Indamire, passably. Peath was obliged to take a card, and sat down where he could see his wife and his father. He wished he were not going to play—he should lose his money, he knew. He

never could remember what cards were out, and now his whole interest was absorbed in the game of chess, into which he had hastily tricked his wife. He was overwhelmed at the feeling that he had done a cowardly action.

He could not discover much in contemplating his father's countenance; a barber's block would have vied with the peer in expression; but poor Myra's face seemed flushed and troubled, and the lobe of her ear, which Peath could see best, it being presented to him, appeared very red.

"I shall never forgive myself if he beats her," said the husband.

In truth, Myra had got into trouble, like many other young players, by her impetuosity. Having the move, she had the attack, and made a raid with her queen on her adversary's castled king, supported by her white bishop. The wary old peer contrived to hem in her majesty. The queen must die, there was no help for it.

To do as much mischief as possible before she expired was all that could be hoped. She managed to take a castle, and one of her pawns succeeded in capturing a bishop. The adversary's game, however, had been thrown into confusion, and his pawns were straggling.

"A game is never lost till it is won," thought Myra. "How much I long to beat that narrow-headed, disagreeable old man!"

She had begun by being nervous about Peath losing his money. Now she felt as if she did not care what either of them lost so that she could do Peath some credit by beating her antagonist. She had found that she could last longer as a player than even her father. Her young brain did not weary of the perplexing combinations of chess as do those of older players. "I may beat him yet, if we go on long enough," she said, yet she felt herself losing ground. With her weakened forces, she could only

stand on the defensive, and her antagonist took every opportunity of changing pieces, so as to decrease her strength. "A mean sneak" Myra pronounced him to be, under her breath.

At length Lord Arras lost his caution, and made a move with his queen. Myra's heart beat frantically whilst the piece was in the air, hoping he would put it on a particular square. It descended just where she wished it to be. She waited till her adversary's fingers were well off the board, and then, with a twinkle in her darkly shadowed eyes, she said:

"Would not your Lordship like to retract that move?"

"How—what—gracious! You don't mean to say——"

"Yes," replied Myra sweetly. "My next move will be to check king and queen with my knight. It would be a pity to spoil your game by persisting in such a disastrous move. I always make

a point of playing the strict game myself," she said quietly, "but I never desire my adversaries to do likewise."

The Earl looked very crestfallen, and took back his move, but he flushed and grew flurried, and the next few moves he made were bad ones. At length Myra was left with a castle and three pawns kept well together at her right flank, opposite the place where, in her first raid, she had disordered her enemy's outworks.

Lord Arras had a pawn within two squares of becoming a queen, his first having fallen a victim to Myra's skill, a move or two after he had retracted that in which he had placed her in peril. He had, besides, a bishop and a knight. Myra sacrificed her remaining piece to take the obnoxious pawn, and then drew a long breath.

"I don't believe the old buffer is up to beating me with a knight and a bishop, even had I not a single pawn.

As it is, here goes," she thought, and pushed up a pawn, carefully protected by her king. In vain did the black bishop strive to obtain either of the pet chickens, which the king, like an old hen, kept brooding, as he drove them slowly to one point. He kept himself as much as possible on the white squares, and the enemy's knight lost half its power from having to work so near the edge of the board.

At length Myra's attention could afford to relax. She turned her head to see what Peath was about, and finding his eyes watching her anxiously, she gave him a smile and a glance of such sparkling brightness, that he hoped she had a good chance of victory. He did not know it was so near.

An instant after Myra called "Queen," pushing her pawn down, and "Checkmate," she added, in a sweet deprecating tone of triumph.

"What, sir," cried Lord Lyrate, looking off his cards, "you don't mean to say that you have been beaten?"

"Ahem! Yes, certainly. You see, I made an oversight" (folks who lose at chess always do make oversights). "It was entirely an oversight, I assure you, and it lost me the game."

"I cannot believe *that*," cried Myra, tossing back her curls. "It was no oversight. Lord Arras was too courteous to beat his guest and daughter-in-law on the first evening of her visit. To-morrow night I feel assured I shall have no chance."

Lord Arras smiled and accepted the compliment, which was an untruth, and which every one suspected to be an untruth, but which comforted his dignity, nevertheless; and as the game had lasted till near midnight, the company separated and retired to rest.

When Myra and Peath retired to their rooms, the young wife making a lever of

her husband's shoulders with the tips of her fingers, she sprang thrice in the air, a feat which made her curls fly up in a most elfish way, and then, looking up in his face, said:

"There is a war-dance of triumph at having beaten the old sneak."

"My dear, my father—— "

"Oh yes, I know what you would say, he is our fellow-creature. I know that old story; but you know, my dear Peath, I must tell it or burst. You are a reed, and I am Midas' barber."

"Dear me, you do talk so strangely, my child, but you are surprisingly handsome. But I wish, Myra, you would have a little more care in what you say before them, such queer words—slang."

"Ah! I know, 'keep my mouth as it were with a bridle, whilst the ungodly are in my sight.'"

"My relatives are not ungodly, Myra," replied Peath, rather offended.

"Oh no, of course not. I was only quoting the Psalms of David, Peath."

"But, Myra, I never heard you talk slang before the Doctor."

"Of course not. Knew too well for that. Should have been properly *tunded* if I had."

"*Tunded!* what is that?"

"Ah! I forgot you were an Etonian, not a Wintonian. You see, we had such a succession of *slangers*, that I caught a little from each boy, and mixed it all together. 'Twas like the Saturday's pie. Don't you remember that we always had a pie on Saturdays? Well, my dear, old Mary used to collect all the scraps off the plates that no one would eat, and put them into a savoury pie."

She flung herself back in her chair and laughed till the merry tears ran down her blooming cheeks, at the look of disgust and discomfiture in the face of her husband.

"Don't grieve, hubby!" she cried. "I took the pies into my own hands as soon as I was fourteen, and then Susan became cook, and I will answer for your having had wholesome meat since then, and before that blissful era you had not enlightened us by your presence. But are you not glad that I beat him?"

"Yes, my dear, only I fear he will never forgive you, nor me either, for having married such a clever little wife."

Myra became thoughtful. She sank into a delicious easy-chair before a large fire and regarded the glowing embers with a fixed gaze.

"Peath, I'm so sorry I married you!"

"Sorry?" cried the husband, reproachfully.

"Yes, sorry. But for me you might always have lived here, and been jolly for evermore."

"My dear!"

"We can never have such delicious fires

and easy-chairs at the vicarage as these; and then the dinner and the ice—fancy eating ice like that every day!"

"I should be dreadfully bored to live with my father always. There is nothing like liberty. One has a sense of subjection with some people."

"Ah! I know. You can't talk slang before him."

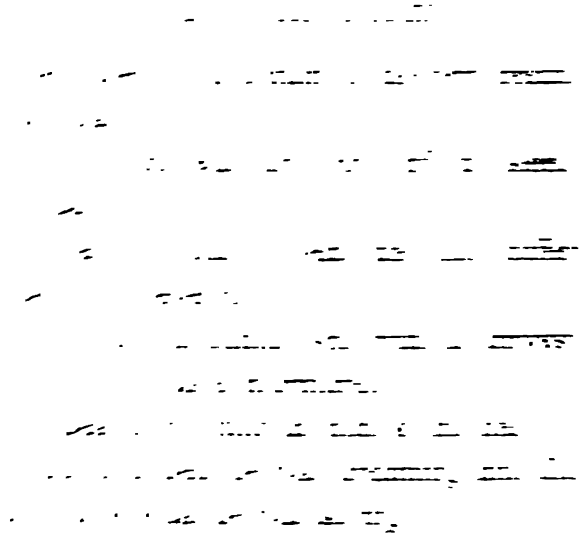
"I never talk slang before any one."

"I mean, that you feel with Lord Arras as I do with the Doctor—

> 'Upon my mouth a constant stopper,
> Lest any word should be improper;'

but I am glad you are not as sorry for yourself as I am for you."

"My darling," cried Peath, looking at her as she sat in her petticoat, with her hair about her shoulders, "if you were not half so clever and so beautiful, I would rather be master of my little vicarage, with a girl with half your attractions, than live in the splendid dulness of this great house



CHAPTER XVI.

"I care not, Fortune, what you me deny,
You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace;
You cannot shut the windows of the sky,
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face.
You cannot bar my constant feet to trace
The woods and lawns, by living streams at eve,
Let health my nerves and finer fibres brace,
And I their toys to the great children leave.
Of fancy, reason, virtue, naught can me bereave."

On the following morning, the breakfast hour being ten, Peath followed his natural indolence and slept late, whilst Myra followed her natural activity, and was up with the lark, rushing over gravel walks, and acres of fern-grown park, and startling the deer from their lairs in the dewy dells.

She enjoyed herself exceedingly, and made her feet wet and her petticoats draggled, so that she had to remake her

toilette, when she returned to their room. If she had regretted her having excluded Peath from the grand house, from the scene indoors, she had the feeling much stronger when she saw the paradise of extended woods, dewy glades, half veiled in mist, and heard all the melodies of morning in the song of early birds. She could not but pity Peath for losing the power of being amongst such manifold beauties. But luckily Peath could not much care for them, or he would not prefer to lie in bed with the pretty chintz curtains drawn round him, to having a brisk walk over the dewy grass.

The good-natured housekeeper came to the door of the young bride at nine o'clock, and asked if she would like a cup of tea. "Poor young thing! she has no maid to look after her comfort," was the woman's thought.

"Oh, yes. How very nice of you! I should like it so much!" said the young

lady, "and a piece of bread-and-butter, please, nice and thick—no bread and scrape."

So the housemaid brought up a tray, with ham, toast, and eggs, and Myra had a good breakfast in comfort, eating and reading a novel alternately, with infinite relish for each.

Whilst the family were at breakfast—those who appeared, for Lady Iris took hers in her room—Myra wandered through the picture-gallery, and looked with interest and wonder at the treasures of art it contained. She was quick-witted, and guessed the subjects as soon as she saw them, without requiring a catalogue. She did not know the names or styles of the painters, and was more interested in a sketch of a dead knight, who fell at Flodden Field, and was represented as he lay, propped up against the walls of a monastery, whilst a monk stands by with the unpartaken Host in his hands, than

with the most elaborately finished painting by Correggio.

She knew nothing about manipulation or arrangement of figures, she only cared for subject and handsome faces; moreover, she preferred modern paintings. "Those dark pictures may have been very fine once," she said, "but they are not the colour of living flesh and blood now."

When the party assembled at luncheon, Lord Arras asked how she had spent the morning, and she said in walking in the park and looking at the pictures in the gallery.

The old peer was proud of his pictures, and inquired which she preferred.

Peath was longing to give her a hint to name a particular favourite of his father's—a Claude.

Myra did not know which she was expected to admire, so she said that, amongst so many beauties, she could scarcely make up her mind.

"We will walk through the gallery together after luncheon," observed the peer, hoping to hear praises of the work he most preferred.

Then thinking Lady Iris might feel herself neglected, he put the same question to her, as to how she had spent the morning.

"She had," she said, "been reading 'Tasso' aloud to Lady Indamire."

"Yes, 'tis such a treat to hear such a perfect accent," cried the unmarried lady. "Lady Iris is an accomplished Italian scholar. I wish," cried she, turning to poor Myra, "that you had been with us. You *must* have enjoyed it."

Myra made no reply. She did not know a word of Italian.

Lord Lyrate wished to have a little conversation with his new relative, suspecting from her silence that she did not understand Italian.

"Are you fond of French novels, Mrs. Peath?" he asked.

"I do not know," replied the girl, colouring.

"You have not made up your mind?"

"No," said Myra shortly.

"She does not know a word of French either, I fancy," was Lord Lyrate's thought.

"Here is some honeycomb," he continued, addressing her. "Will you have some? You suggested to me last night that ice must have come from Olympus—

'C'est du séjour des dieux que les abeilles viennent.'"

Myra flushed painfully.

"You must talk English, Lord Lyrate," she said, "if you wish me to answer you. I do not understand French, if that be French which you have quoted."

A solemn silence followed. Peath suffered for his young wife's mortification. Lord Arras moralized to himself: "This comes of a young man's marrying a creature without the common education of a milliner's apprentice."

However, when they rose from the luncheon table, he summoned all into the library, where there was, he said, a picture which had been sent from the dealer's for his Lordship to purchase, if he approved.

The company all followed Lord Arras, and his carpenter was summoned to remove the screws and lift the cover from the concealed treasure.

The scene represented a wild sea-coast, and lying on the sands was the figure of a youth, whose beauty was dimmed by coming death. A few terrified attendants are lifting his head, and disembarrassing him from the wreck of his chariot. In the far distance, rushing towards the mountains, were his steeds, pursued by a monstrous creature, in the form of a bull, breathing fire from his nostrils.

"A magnificent composition," Lord Lyrate pronounced it to be.

"What drawing!" cried Lord Arras.

"What *chiaroscuro!*" echoed Lady Indamire.

"What touching beauty in the face of the youth!" cried Lady Iris.

"He seems to be dying," said Peath.

"What is the subject?" asked Lord Arras, turning to his eldest son.

"I have not the remotest idea," replied Lord Lyrate.

"The picture-dealer tells me that no one can guess," observed the Earl.

"Cannot you surmise, Lady Iris?"

"No, I really cannot," replied the lady.

"Of course, Peath, you know nothing about it."

This was a safe, but certainly not a kind assertion.

"I think I can tell you," said Myra, indignant at the insult to her husband. "You see, I happen to know exactly where to find it."

They all looked round with astonish-

ment to hear this conviction expressed in a clear childish voice.

"Where do you think the subject can be found?"

"If Lord Arras will permit me," Myra replied, looking round the library shelves. "Oh, Peath, do tell me where to find an Euripides."

He pointed out the shelf, and springing on to the library steps and possessing herself of the volume she wanted, she turned to "Hippolytus," and looking towards the end of the tragedy, she pointed out the passage to Lord Arras.

"The Greek character is so very indistinct in these old copies," said the Earl, wiping his spectacles, and trying vainly to discover the sense.

"Will *you* read it, Lord Lyrate?" asked Myra, maliciously. Come, let us see what your rendering of the passage would be in English."

"'Tis some years since I was a prefect

of Winchester commoners, Mrs. Peath. My Greek is somewhat rusty."

"Like my *French*, eh?"

"But you will give me no credit for penetration in finding out the subject of the picture unless you find how exactly it fits. So I will translate it, 'for the benefit of country gentlemen,' as the Doctor says."

She began, and gave a correct version of the account given by the messenger to Theseus, with spirit and energy.

"There you see, Lord Arras, the picture represents the meaning of the writer exactly. There is the wounded and dying hunter on the sea-beach, and in the distance, going towards the mountains, the terrified steeds and the frightful monster."

"What extraordinary erudition in a lady, and in one so young!"

"Oh no, my Lord, not extraordinary, for I have been at it, teaching the boys, ever since I can remember; and would

not the Doctor have *pitched in* if I had construed it wrongly, or made a wrong quantity?"

"She has the advantage now," thought poor Peath. "I only wish she would not say such queer words."

In truth, in her father's presence Myra spoke in choice English, well strung into sentences. When away from him she seemed to cast off all restraint, as she would have done in ridding her body of a pair of stiff stays. This made her talk twofold in its nature: any one seeing her on her good behaviour would think her correct even to pedantry in her conversation, but once off her guard, and she made an *olla podrida* of the slang of the various pupils whom she had helped to educate at the curacy, and who degraded her parts of speech in return.

It may seem odd that she did not restrain herself before her new relatives; but she took a daring and mischievous

delight in shocking their prejudices, in revenge for their evident slight of Peath.

She had a choice and not refined collection of sayings. "Look out for yourselves, as the jackass said when he danced amongst the chickens," was one of them. She liked to imitate that provoking animal, and dance over the customs of the stiff set into which she had been brought by marriage.

The Earl showed her much greater respect after the unconscious exhibition she had made of learning so little valued by herself. He took her round the picture gallery, and Peath having prompted her, she praised the favourite "Claude" as much as the peer expected, luckily concealing that what she thought was the solemn twilight, succeeding the departure of the sun, which had left its glowing glory in the rich sky, the painter had meant to represent sunrise. The so-called "Claude" was a copy, and the painter's colours had

darkened with time. His greens had blackened, his light greys, very sparse at any time, had lost their delicate pearly tint. Years after, Myra saw a more recent copy made of this subject, where the painter, keeping closely to the original, had used such colours as suited the freshness of the morning hour, and the effect was magical.

After luncheon, the two titled ladies rode out, attended by the Earl and Lord Lyrate, but Myra had to remain at home, because she had no habit, and this gave a little mortification to her and to Peath, and made them both anxious to get over the rest of the visit, and take possession of the small vicarage which was to be in future their home.

That day a bishop was to dine with Lord Arras. Peath heard it from the butler in the course of the day, and that a large party had been asked to meet him, and informed his wife of the fact in an awe-stricken tone.

"Yes?" she said, inquiringly. "A bishop is a peer, is he not? Well, your father and your brother are peers. I have supped full of horrors," she added, laughing; "this bishop-peer can't be worse than the others—

> 'Hampden and Pym, with their radical cheers,
> Lopped the bishops and sliced the peers,'"

she added, dancing round the room—

> "'Then hey for radical reform,
> To raise in England a glorious storm;
> For we'll level each purse-proud aristocrat,
> With a whisk of Harry the Ninth's white hat.'"

"Pray be grave, Myra," said Peath very solemnly. "My living is very small."

"And papa has none at all. My dear," said the incorrigible girl, "when you have a young filly, full of spirit and play, and want her to go quietly, just give her a gallop over the turf. Now, as you know not what I require, I am taking it out of myself, that I may behave with proper decorum at dinner. Don't fret, Peath dear; I should not wonder if the

Right Reverend Father in God thought me more worth talking to than any one else in the house."

"I am sure," replied Peath, looking at her tenderly, "that he must think you most worth looking at."

CHAPTER XVII.

"Alas! the woes of ripening age,
A word most wanted proves a rover,
And vainly memory we engage,
For help to bridge the chasm over."

E.

THE Bishop of Dulchester had been raised to his position by his scholarship. Of this he was proud—too proud of the wings which had borne him aloft to forbear flapping them in the faces of his associates. On other souls than Peath's did his Lordship sit heavy.

"Why did you ask that reverend bore here, sir?" demanded Lord Lyrate of the Earl.

"I should like to know how I was to avoid it, and a confirmation here, under my very nose, one may say. I don't look

forward to his coming with any pleasure, I can tell you. It is bad enough to have to talk on subjects that one ought to take an interest in, but don't—such as parochial schools, etc.—without having to pretend to understand quotations of which you have forgotten the meanings, if you ever knew them. And that reminds me, Lyrate, that you were hard on Mrs. Peath about the French and Italian; and did she not pay you off with the passage from Euripides! I blushed for you."

"As to that, sir, your failing eyesight stood you in good stead on that occasion, and I was blushing for my father."

"Well! It will be but for one evening. He will come late; and if the champagne is put round freely, perhaps he will forget to quote."

A large party had been invited to meet the great man, who arrived, and was introduced to the ladies just as they were sitting down to dinner; but not catching

Myra's name, and hearing only the word "daughter," as Lord Arras droped his voice at the "in-law," unintentionally, the bishop looked at her with approval, wondering how the Earl had managed to have one daughter so bright and spirited, when the other looked so faded and washed out.

Lady Indamire, seated on one side of his Lordship, hoped that he had found the average number of children for confirmation, and admired the very interesting and erudite discourse with which he had favoured them that day. It was true that Lady Indamire had not understood three consecutive sentences in the sermon, but she was modest enough to believe that her want of comprehension was her own fault, and that others had been benefited, though she had not.

"A most excellent discourse, my Lord Bishop. Turbot?"

"Thank you, Lord Arras. I am glad you liked my sermon. You see, I am ever

keeping in mind the words of Plato, and enforcing them on the minds of the young—

''Εγὼ αὐτὸς, ὦ παῖ, ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς, νῦν τε παρακελεύομαι, καὶ ἐν λοιπῷ χρόνῳ, καὶ ἀναμιμνήσκω καὶ διακελεύομαι προθυμεῖσθαι εἶναι ὡς ἄριστος.' ''

In making this quotation in a round sonorous voice, the worthy Bishop forgot a word, and hesitated. Myra, sitting next to him, had often been on the watch to prompt a pupil who never had known, or had forgotten his lesson, and softly supplied the missing word, which enabled the Bishop to conclude his speech without the slightest loss of dignity. He got red about the ears, however; and though his eyes were fixed on Lord Arras, glaring all the more from astonishment, his mind was filled with wonder as to how the missing word had been murmured in his ear.

It seemed impossible that the rosy-faced girl should have supplied it. Dreadful suspicions that some learned footman—

some future bishop in embryo—should have perceived his predicament and met the difficulty for him, floated through his reverend head. He lost all disposition to quote any more for some time, and the discussion of the finest turbot of the season precluded the discussion of the finest sermon amongst the guests.

Myra, a picture of beautiful and modest girlhood, ate her fish in silence, watched by Peath, who had trembled lest she should commit any breach of etiquette.

When the last morsel had disappeared from the Bishop's plate, but the other guests were still busy with the contents of theirs, and a convenient hum of conversation was going on, he turned to his bright-eyed neighbour.

"It is strange," said his Lordship.

"Yes," my lord.

"It is strange," the Bishop continued, "what tricks memory play us as we grow old."

"Your Lordship cannot have any reason to discover that already, I am sure," said Myra.

The Bishop smiled sweetly. He was an old man, and he felt like the lady mentioned by Sterne, who, being complimented by him on her personal attractions, put off her period of being *dévote* for ten years.

"What a very intelligent girl!" was his Lordship's thought. "I could have sworn," he said, smiling, "that when I made that quotation just now, and dropped a word unexpectedly, as one drops a bead from a string, which one has to look for with the chance that the whole row will be spoilt before the loss is supplied, that some one murmured the missing link."

Myra looked out from the shadow of her curls with a wicked glance, which would have been a wink addressed to any one less grave than a Right Reverend Father in God.

"Surely you did not help the lame old dog?" said the Bishop, returning the smile.

In reply, Myra quoted the passage.

"My dear young lady! Lord Arras must have taken great pains with your education."

"My father did," replied Myra. "I have not the honour of belonging to the family of Lord Arras, excepting by marriage."

"Oh, indeed! I quite mistook. And married so early?"

"Loin of mutton or boiled beef?" asked the footman.

His Lordship turned his attention from Myra to the more important and crying demands of his appetite.

When the rage of hunger was assuaged, Lady Indamire wanted to say something, but could not think what subject to broach.

His Lordship turned to Myra.

"You remind me, my dear young lady, of an incident which happened to me when I was a boy. I was at the head

of my class, and if I retained my position for the whole of the half-year, an uncle had promised to make some sacrifice to send me to college. I had a rival and competitor who rendered my tenure of position very insecure."

"Champagne, Moselle?" suggested the butler.

The Bishop took some still Moselle, and went on with his story, seeing Myra's eager eyes fixed on his face.

"He was a very clever fellow—cleverer than I, I believe."

"Ah! that could not have been the case," exclaimed Myra, with a charming appearance of sincerity.

The Bishop bowed.

"What the devil can that old fool of a Bishop be about, bowing and looking so pleased while he talks to Mrs. Peath?" said Lord Arras to himself, not much gratified that the Right Reverend Father preferred Myra to Indamire.

"As I was saying—" continued the Bishop.

"Jelly, my lord?"

The Bishop put it away impatiently.

Lord Lyrate looked up and saw the gesture, and that the worthy dignitary was irritated at being interrupted in his talk with Myra.

"That girl is cutting us all out," he thought, "a bold, forward, vulgar young woman."

Peath saw it all, too, and thought that his young wife was fulfilling her prophecy, and making the Bishop prefer her conversation to that of any one else. It was less her talk than her accomplishment of being an intelligent listener.

"Well, my dear lady," continued the visitor, "I remember it so well. We were put on in the 4th act of Œdipus Tyrannus. I had the first part of the speech very perfect—indeed, I thought myself pretty safe in all parts of that

fine play. I went on swimmingly till I came to ἄγχιστος γὰρ εἶ. The words had dropped out from my memory as completely as did that with which you just now supplied me. I felt ready to sink down on the school boards; my face flushed; my ears rang with strange sounds; I ransacked my memory with the speed of lightning to find the missing words, but they would not come at my call. My dry lips tried to form sounds at random, when my rival and enemy, as I had always considered him, turned his head as if to look behind him, and whispered the missing link. I went on then bravely, and I have to thank the generous act of that boy that I am this day in my present position, for it was the foundation of my fortune."

"A beautiful incident," said Myra. "And did your rivalry turn to an enduring friendship, my lord? Do you still hold that man dear?"

"Ah, madam—

'Mickle of joy and sorrow comes youth and age between.'

Success is not always clutched with sudden grasp. He who is climbing is too eager to know where to plant foot and hand to pay much attention to others engaged in the same occupation. I lost sight of my generous rival entirely. I have not heard of him for thirty-seven years; he is probably dead by this time. He was an accomplished classic, and a youth most gentle in manner and innocent in his tastes."

"Does your Lordship remember his name?"

"Yes. His name was Leith—Basil Leith."

"Your Lordship was at Winchester?"

"Yes."

"Then that man is my father."

"Bless me! you don't say so. Your father! I am delighted to hear of him. I hope he is quite well, and has prospered

in the world according to his deserts. Where does he live?"

"He holds the curacy of Birchwood-cum-Loame. It is a good curacy," said Myra simply. "Eighty pounds a-year and a house. He takes pupils, you see, and that's why he taught me so much of learning unusual for girls, because I had to teach the stupid ones. Peath, my husband, was his last pupil."

"Ah-h!" said the Bishop, "I can see it all. I must congratulate Mr. Peath Sandridge. He found something more valuable than the dead languages at Birchwood-cum-Loame. I shall be glad to renew my acquaintance with your worthy father. It is strange, is it not, that prompting seems to run in the family? Your father prompted me when I was a boy, and you do me the same good office in my old age."

The Bishop had now a fruitful subject of conversation. He talked of his school

days, the efforts made by himself and Leith to avoid fagging. How they used to hide themselves behind the towels in the Conduit gallery, to avoid being sent to the hills.

Myra suggested one or two forgotten Winchester words, and asked his Lordship if he ever took a *thoke* on Sunday mornings now, a reminiscence which brought tears of merriment into the old man's eyes.

Any slang but Winchester slang would have been an abomination to him, and Myra carefully avoided intrenching on any from the other schools, so the impression she made on the old man was, that she was the cleverest and most charming young girl he had ever met.

"Taken that milk-and-water fellow in, has she?" was his Lordship's meditation. "I think she has the worst of the bargain. She would adorn a coronet, rather than receive adornment from it. He is only a younger brother without any fortune

but a living of four hundred a-year. Poor girl ! she deserves a better fate," mused the old man, who knew better than Myra what four hundred a-year would and would not procure.

How differently people judge of the same circumstances. All Peath's relatives thought he had thrown himself away. An unbiassed observer considered that Myra was worst off.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"There is a solitude more deep
Than that we feel on desert shores,
It is when company we keep
With puffed-up wealth or titled bores."

THE dessert had been on the table for some time, and as the Bishop was enjoying an excellent glass of old port wine, Lady Indamire gave the signal for the ladies to withdraw.

Alas! for the poor young bride—literally poor—her poverty was guessed at by all the women in the room, when she was known to be a young married woman, and was found guilty of wearing white muslin without any satin slip or lace trimmings. Her dress would have

been perfectly proper for a young lady not introduced; but its plainness was shocking to the dowagers and their daughters, who understood in an instant that this was the artful girl who had taken in the Honourable Peath Sandridge to marry her, thus having forced herself into a family infinitely superior to her own in rank, and thereby deprived those who were his equals of their chance of matrimony. For though Peath was a younger son, he would have been better than nothing for a young lady with a few hundreds a-year of her own.

Though Myra was in her father-in-law's house and might be supposed to feel at home, she was in reality completely ostracized by the gay company around. The women drew round the fire, excluding her who did not put herself forward. What could plain book-muslin do amongst those richly trimmed satins and velvets, or those tumbling

curls of hers compared to the diamond tiaras and feathers of the wealthy guests? Their talk was on subjects which Myra could understand as little as they would have comprehended a page of Æschylus, or a passage from the "Georgics." She looked at the books of photographs lying on the table, but soon wearied of the ugliness of the representations—men whose trousers seemed the most obtrusive part of the pictures, and ladies whose flounced petticoats threw their heads into nullity. Then she did not know the originals, which was one cause of her want of interest in the pictures. Two dowagers were talking of the difference between Brussels lace and Mechlin. Some young ladies were discussing the merits of the last ball, and of their different partners.

Myra, thinking of her enjoyment on the previous evening, went up to Lady Iris timidly, and asked her to play something on the harp.

"Not yet," replied the lady, with more asperity than befitted one so high born, thereby giving Myra suspicion that housemaids and titled ladies were much on a par when out of temper.

Lady Iris was too well satisfied with her own position to care for Myra's monopoly of the Bishop. In truth, she had rather a spiteful pleasure in seeing her dear sister-in-law, Indamire, worsted; but how could Mrs. Peath be so careless as to ask her to sing her best song before the gentlemen came up?

Myra, rebuffed, turned to the photograph book, of which she was beginning to loathe the sight, and longed for Peath to come up, as a kind of protection, from the cold eyes of some, and the half-concealed contempt of others. Not that she had found darling Peath all that she had hoped. He was very nice and fond of her occasionally, and especially when they were alone; but he seemed also frequently

to be *Sandridged*—to be possessed by a notion in his innocent noddle that the Sandridges were the wise of the earth, and that wisdom would die with them; and that morning had given an opinion against her, in favour of Indamire.

Still she hoped he would soon come up and speak to her, and she looked anxiously at the door for the ingress of the gentlemen. It opened, but it was only the footman with coffee. That was better than nothing, and she waited till all the company were provided, and then the coffee-pot had to be taken down to be refilled. Every one else was sipping that inspiring infusion, and poor Myra felt that she was nobody. At length the footman came back laden with the heavy silver waiter, and on it the coffee-pot, still heavier, from its contents. Myra tried to lift it, but being on a low seat she could not, and tilted it only. In doing this she unconsciously pressed it against the finger

and thumb of the footman, who bore the burning like a martyr for an instant, but his agony increasing, he gave an audible "Oh-h! you're burning my hand, ma'am."

There was a dead silence suddenly. The gabble of the ladies ceased. Every one looked at Myra inquiringly. The Ladies Iris and Indamire were busy in mental conjecture, as to whether Mrs. Peath had intended to play a practical joke on the footman. "That girl is capable of anything," they thought. "Such a low-born creature."

Poor Myra and the footman each looked very red and guilty. He went down to have his wounded feelings and fingers consoled by the kitchen-maid, who gave him some scraped potato, whilst Myra drank her coffee without cream, which she vehemently desired to have, because she had been too much flurried to take any, even had the frightened footman remained long enough to permit it.

So profound was the silence, that Myra's teaspoon made a frightful click against the saucer. "Oh dear! What am I going to do next?" she said; "break this fine china, I suppose. When will this ever end? I am not fit for gay folks. I wish I were at home with papa."

At length the door opened, and the gentlemen entered. Peath sauntered up and spoke to her.

"Oh, I am glad you are come! I was so dull with these people."

"Hush, my dear! They are the very best society in the neighbourhood."

"Are they, Peath? Then, upon my word, I wish I had a little of the very worst, for a change."

"Hush-h!" again whispered Peath.

And the clatter of tea and coffee cups began with the gentlemen. When it had subsided, Myra saw Lady Iris go towards the harp, and her face beamed over with anticipated pleasure.

Lady Iris sang, and all the company went into raptures, excepting the Bishop, who listened politely, and took advantage of the quietude of the party to look round for the daughter of his old school-fellow. He saw Peath near her, and smiled to himself. The spell is on him still, poor fellow! Poor girl, rather. Whilst the praises were being accumulated on Lady Iris's performance, the Bishop asked Myra if she sang.

"No," she said, smiling, "only in church."

"Then you play on some instrnment?"

"No, not any."

"Heaven be praised," said the Bishop.

"Oh, I should be so glad to play like Lady Iris! Surely you like to hear playing on the harp?"

He shook his head.

"I had rather not," he said, "if I must confess the truth, Mrs. Peath, and you will not betray me."

"But you know, in heaven there will be so much of it," said Myra gravely.

"My dear Mrs. Peath, Bishop Horne said that there are some excellent people whom it will be time enough to meet in heaven. Now, in heaven—heavenly harping no doubt will be angelical; but I can afford to wait till I get there to hear it."

Peath moved off to speak to one of the guests, and the Bishop seeing the chessmen set out, asked Myra if she played. On her replying in the affirmative, they sat down and began a game. Myra soon found that the Bishop could scarcely be called a chess player, certainly not by that crucial test—could any one give him a queen and beat him? Myra felt that she could be that person, and that the Bishop wanted to talk to her about himself, his school days, mixed up with her father; what tricks they played the masters, and how soundly they were flogged, when found out.

The old man laughed merrily at these reminiscences, and put his queen into *prise* most recklessly, till Myra felt that it would be worse than folly to attempt to play the strict game with him. She expected no pleasure to result from the finishing of the game. So she went on, replacing his men when he played absurdly, till she saw Lord Arras approaching, when she became very serious, and managed so adroitly that the Bishop checkmated her just as her father-in-law looked over the board.

"So you are beaten?" cried Lord Arras, spitefully.

"Yes, my Lord," replied Myra, demurely. "It is the fortune of war sometimes."

"In chess all depends on skill," said Lord Arras, sententiously.

"Yes; or on good nature," Myra replied, smiling in his face, "as I found last night when you permitted me to beat you."

"It must have been an oversight last night," thought Lord Arras, "as the Bishop checkmated her."

"If you have quite finished your talk with my friend the Lord Bishop, perhaps you will give me an opportunity of retrieving my fortune," said her father-in-law, with a grim smile.

The Bishop moved away reluctantly. He would have to converse on the topics of the day, instead of returning to the pranks of boyhood, the memory of which had made his eyes fill with merry tears.

Myra sat herself down with a determination to beat her noble father-in-law, and repay on him the mortification she had suffered during the evening, and playing more carefully than on the previous night, she was enabled to carry out her design. Lord Arras was beaten. He put up the men again in silence, and returned to the charge. He lost a second and a third game, and left off, hating Mrs. Peath with all his heart.

Lord Arras had two ugly red spots on his narrow cheeks when he arose and pushed away the board—

> "The child might rue that was unborn
> The combat of that day."

He determined that Mrs. Peath should never again enter his doors, and he kept his word.

The games had taken some considerable time to play, and the party broke up when they concluded. The Bishop of Dulchester said good-night and good-bye to his host. He must start very early.

"Surely you will take breakfast first?"

"A cup of coffee only," said his Lordship; and Lord Arras agreed.

"Well, Myra, did my father beat you at chess?"

"No, but the Bishop did, *really. Really* he checkmated me; you don't think I was going to beat a Bishop?"

"But my father?"

"I beat him once, twice, thrice, and then he had had enough."

"Myra!"

"Well, my dear! you yourself told me to beat him within an inch of his life, and really I thought he was going into a fit of apoplexy, he grew so red in the face. How grateful Lady Iris would have been; as for Lord Lyrate, he would have been afflicted and consoled at the same time."

"Pray don't say such disagreeable things, Myra; you make me quite uncomfortable, and you will never be asked here again—*never!*"

"With your society, my dear, I think I may put up with the absence of any which your family can offer."

Peath was pleased, but I question whether he would have been so had he seen how much he had deteriorated in Myra's affection since they had been at the castle. She saw twenty different phases of likeness between her husband and his father, Lord Lyrate, and Lady Indamire. In her opinion, each was silly and dis-

agreeable, and puffed up with a sense of importance of the family of Sandridge—an importance derived from what their ancestors had done four hundred years ago.

"Bless me!" thought the girl.

> "'These pictures, with their worn-out graces,
> Long beards, long noses, and pale faces,
> Make such an antiquated scene,
> They quite o'erwhelm me with the spleen.'

I look round the dinner-table and see Lord Arras, Lord Lyrate, Indamire, and Peath. They all seem made in one mould. I look up to the walls and recognize the same narrow foreheads, small eyes, hooked noses, and pursed-up mouths. There is the same vacant look in all—the same weak receding chin."

There was one exception. In Peath's bedroom there was a drawing in chalk, mildew-spotted, and generally shabby in appearance. There was the hooked family nose, but a look of exceeding acuteness in the finely-formed head and

brow, and the eagle eyes deeply shadowed by the forehead.

"Who is that, Peath?" asked the young wife.

"Oh, that? Some ancestor," said her husband, carelessly.

When she arose next morning, she turned round the picture to seek for some inscription, and was rewarded by one of the following nature :—

Portrait of Peath Sandridge, Scrivener, of Aldgate, London. He amassed a large fortune, and leaving it to his son, who married the daughter of a wealthy soap-boiler, became the founder of the Sandridge family. His son purchased the estate, and built the seat now possessed by the Earl of Arras.

"Soh!" said the girl, "great rivers come from small rivulets, seemingly. Yet these stupid folks look down on me."

She was determined to be dressed in time to see the Bishop before he departed, and tripped down the richly-carpeted stairs noiselessly, entering the breakfast-room at one door, just as the Bishop appeared at

the other. His face brightened as he saw her.

"What! are you come to keep me company, that I may not have a solitary meal?" he asked.

"Yes, my Lord, I wished to have the pleasure of seeing you once more. To be with some one who knew my father, and valued him, made me feel happier than I had yet done in this house, where all is so cold and strange to me."

Myra's voice went off into a very undignified quaver, as she gave utterance to this sentiment, and the Bishop, seeing tears in her large eyes, took her arm and pulled her into the seat next to him.

"Now cut me some tongue, and butter me some toast, just as if I were your father. I am sure you are a good daughter, eh?"

"Pretty well, sir. I think I should be less provoking, had I to live my life over again."

"Ah, my dear, we all feel that. Now

just write in my note-book your father's address. I have a very bad memory."

Myra complied, and the carriage coming round, the old man gave her many kind messages to her father, and wished her good-bye, with a cordiality amounting to tenderness.

Myra looked after the carriage sadly, and felt as if she were deprived of a friend.

Peath was becoming more and more *Sandridged* daily, whilst he lived with his own family.

Myra was eager to get away, for she foresaw that her weak husband was not unlikely to adopt the tone of contempt with which all his family regarded her in different degrees.

Lady Iris did not trouble herself in any way about Myra. She was not so deeply impressed by the importance of the family into which she had married, and did not care for them particularly, though she declared that Indamire was a sweet girl

(of six-and-thirty), and very well read. When girls are nonentities, and not beautiful, they are as a rule very popular, and are pronounced to be "sweet girls, and very well read."

CHAPTER XIX.

"Such melting tones from such a careless touch,
Herself so unconcerned, and we so much!
What art is this, that with so little pains,
Transports us thus, and on our spirit reigns?"

LADY IRIS played to Myra on the following day, which was wet, and when there was nothing else to be done, and again Myra was entranced by the melody of the music, and wondered that any one could be indifferent to sounds so exquisite.

Myra did not know that a peculiar organization is required to appreciate music, and those who have it not can enjoy fine sounds as little as the blind can appreciate fine sights.

Poor Myra! how she longed to possess a

harp like that Lady Iris seemed so lovingly to embrace with her arms and feet.

Lady Iris took Myra to her dressing-room, and made her maid produce the wonderful collections of jewellery, given to the young lady on her marriage.

"They are very pretty, indeed—beautiful; but I had rather have your harp than anything."

Lady Iris smiled at her ignorance.

"This drop," she said, "if sold, would purchase three such harps as mine."

"Is it possible?" asked Myra. "But I should prefer the harp, because I could do nothing but look at that beautiful drop, and with the harp there would be the pleasure of learning to play on it, and playing when I had learnt."

"Ah! you would soon get weary of it—at least, I do. In the first place, in learning it, you would take the skin off the tops of your fingers and thumbs. Afterwards the skin becomes callous. Then

the strings break at every change of atmosphere, and the harp requires to be tuned afresh every time you play on it. There is always some refractory piece of catgut which falls out of tune."

Myra looked incredulous.

"There must be some amount of benevolent pleasure," she said, "in conveying so much enjoyment to others as you have given me each time I have heard you play."

"Ah!" replied Lady Iris, carelessly, "but for one person who appreciates it, like yourself, there are twenty like the Bishop of Dulchester, who only listen out of politeness, and had rather not hear it at all." Lady Iris had a half thought of letting Myra try to strike an octave on the harp, but she gave up the idea, from the conviction that an unskilled touch would pull the strings out of tune, and that she should have the trouble of retuning it. So Myra's desire to touch the precious instrument was to be postponed *sine die.*

Myra was glad when the visit concluded, and they set out for their vicarage. On the remaining evenings of their stay, poor Peath was the victim at chess. The Earl, after Myra's triple triumph, tacitly refused to play with her again. His dislike to his daughter-in-law bubbled over in fifty different ways. Sometimes she perceived it; but frequently she was full of some speculation of her own as to the possibility of obtaining a harp.

As I have before observed, when a dog cannot reach a bone which is put away on a high place in the room, on the top of some inaccessible bookshelf or wardrobe, he will sit as near to the treasure as possible.

Now Myra, in the same way, was ever in the drawing-room, devouring the instrument with her eyes, when Lady Iris was absent, and with her ears when she could induce that lady to play on it.

The pertinacity with which Myra

pursued her study of the harp touched Lady Iris, who liked the admiration of a young woman better than no praise at all.

"There is an old harp—a good one, though, one of Erard's—at Belted Woods, my home, on which I learnt to play. When I came out my god-mamma gave me a fine new one. This, you know, belongs to Lady Indamire; but she has no more ear than a turnip, so she cannot tune the harp, and never plays on it consequently. If you like, I will give you my old harp. It is put in the lumber room at Belted Woods. I dare say you would rather have it than none."

Myra flushed with pleasure.

"Oh! how very kind you are, Lady Iris."

"There, you had better write down the address where it is to be sent, and then Saunders, my maid, shall see about it."

Lady Iris was like Pope's Chloe—

"Would Chloe know if you're alive or dead,
She bids her footman put it in her head."

The hope of getting the harp made Myra radiant and absolutely beautiful. Lady Indamire looked at her in meek astonishment; Lord Lyrate, with a kind of grudge that Peath should possess a creature so attractive. He held the opinion of Lovelace, that a charming woman was too bright a jewel to hang round the neck of a poor man.

The Earl stuck out one finger of his left hand with head averted, as his farewell benediction. Lady Iris turned her sallow cheek to receive the kiss which she saw Myra was eager to impress on it.

"You won't forget the harp?" whispered she, too childishly eager to be bashful about it.

"No—tell Saunders," she said languidly.

And Myra ran up the great staircase, though the carriage was waiting, to find Saunders, and remind her to have the harp packed and sent.

As Myra was sharp enough to place her solitary five-shilling piece in her hand, Mrs. Saunders condescended to place the address, which Myra scrawled on a piece of card, into her pocket.

At length Myra got into the carriage, not before she had run back to Lady Iris and thanked her for the kindness she had received from her during her stay at Castle Clear. She bowed slightly to Lord Lyrate, and offered her hand to her sister-in-law, which Lady Indamire took tranquilly, and dropped immediately.

When Myra had settled herself in the carriage, she turned to Peath.

"Thank Heaven!" she cried fervently. "They are a horrid set."

"My dear!" cried Peath.

"All but Lady Iris," said Myra.

But that did not mend matters, as Lady Iris was not his blood relation.

"My dear Peath, 'tis no use to conceal the fact, a more mean disagreeable family

I never met. You have a monopoly of all the good looks, sweet temper, and talent of the family."

I am sorry for Myra's truthfulness on the latter point, but doubtless her partiality for her husband blinded her to the fact that of a very weak set he was one of the very weakest.

He was pacified by this little compliment, and said that poor Lyrate had never got but one above the lowest form at Eton, before he was sent to Winchester.

His father he pronounced to be exceedingly clever, thinking of the dreadful castigations at chess which he inflicted on him.

When Myra asked in what manner he had displayed his talent, he instanced the Earl's beating him at chess; but his wife assured him that chess-playing spoke nothing for the general intellect of the player.

"As an instance, my dear," she said,

"your father beat you, and I beat your father; but no one who knows us can doubt that you are far cleverer than I am, though you have not been compelled to 'cram' as I have done all my life."

"I am glad to find your ideas are so just, my dear little wife. Your sex," said Peath loftily, "must be very inferior to the nobler race of man. You are physically weaker; and though you may boast of a certain discursive quickness, you have no reasoning powers, and you are utterly incapable of governing."

"I quite agree with you," replied his obedient wife, not able to resist a quiet joke, though there was no one to appreciate it. "What dreadful confusion women make when they are entrusted with supreme power. To what a fearful state was England reduced under that ridiculous old woman, Queen Elizabeth. Spain, too, and Russia, under the

domination of Isabella of Castile, and Catherine of Russia. I hope, my dear Peath," she continued, coaxingly, "that if you ever find me infringing on your prerogative in your parish, you will remind me to keep in my proper place, and not to interfere with what does not concern a feeble woman. In the household, indeed, there would be much utterly below your attention, and I hope you will permit me to do all I can to secure your comfort without troubling you to interfere."

It was evening when the fly they had taken on leaving the railway deposited them at the door of the vicarage. Doctor Leith had expended one hundred pounds, the savings of many years, in providing them with furniture, which was consequently of the commonest kind. He had also sent his old servant to stay till the young couple should have hired some one in her place. She had prepared some mutton chops and

potatoes, and cleaned herself to wait on the bride and bridegroom at dinner. The beer was procured from the public-house in the village. There was no wine.

Peath missed the Earl's well-appointed table, and the light French wines.

"We must do something better than this to-morrow, Myra. With my income we can well afford a nice little dinner, and some good wine. I'll write to-morrow to my father's wine merchant to send some."

"I wonder when you will get any tithes?" said Myra, pondering.

"This is September," replied Peath; "they will be paid probably in October."

The evening was misty and damp. The house, though small, seemed gloomy, not to say ghostly, in the empty rooms and unexplored attics.

Myra went upstairs, to coax Susan to light a fire in their bedroom, and

to unpack Peath's clothes, dressing-gown, and dressing-case, leaving him to the discussion of the sour flat beer.

Myra blest her father in her heart for having lent Susan. It sent such a glow of home feeling through the desolate-looking vicarage.

"Sleep seems our only refuge," said Myra to Peath, smiling, coming down-stairs when the room was ready.

"I wish you would not quote and laugh. I think it is no laughing matter. My feet are as cold as stones, and I've nothing but this dreadful slush to drink."

"The water is excellent," said the cheerful young wife. "Papa has sent us sheets and blankets from home well aired. I dare say it will all look brighter to-morrow. Now go to bed, and I'll bring you a hot bottle for your feet."

Myra had seen an old blacking bottle in the coal cellar, and she got Susan to wash it and fill it with boiling water.

This accomplished, she rolled it in flannel and applied it to Peath's feet, who thought bed was the only comfortable looking place in the house, and took to it immediately. There, with his head on the pillow, his feet on the bottle, the red glow of the blazing fire falling on his dressing-gown, and Myra seen through his closing eyelids in her light-coloured dress and dancing curls, flitting here and there, life did not seem so very disagreeable. Besides, he was to be a beneficed clergyman! To think of the dignity of that was a delight. He wondered whether he should find a surplice in the vestry, and wished he had taken care of the one he had at Cambridge, and with that half regret he went to sleep, and dreamed that in reading the Litany he had prayed for King George, Queen Charlotte, and all the deceased Royal Family.

He being disposed of, his wife and

Susan enjoyed a quiet cup of tea together, and talked of home.

Myra and Susan were up betimes next day. "What a mercy that Peath likes to be in bed late!" was her thought.

There was a cosy little room with book-shelves, where the late incumbent, a bachelor, had been accustomed to write his sermons. It was not large enough to be dignified by the title of library, so Myra called it the study.

Susan had procured a roll of drugget for the young lady to take as much as she required, and, sending Susan to the general shop in the village for some tin-tacks, the young wife proceeded to carpet the little room, in which she succeeded, before Peath awoke.

The sun shone into the windows through ivy and Virginian creeper, and Myra thought the vicarage quite charming. It was an old-fashioned primitive looking place, with low rooms and an orchard in

front, on the grass. Beyond the grass and the apple trees was a fence, and, on the opposite side, a piece of glebe land, which the late possessor had planted with winter cabbages. Myra was glad of the apples; some were good table fruit, the rest she saw prospectively in apple dumplings.

She fancied she heard some movenent upstairs, and went at once to see what was the matter. Peath was sneezing spasmodically. He had caught a very bad cold, he said.

Myra was full of sympathy, and went off to make him a cup of hot tea, begging him not to stir out of bed for some hours, and, not believing that her husband was afflicted with any mortal malady, she felt rather glad he was not downstairs to interfere with her efforts for his future comfort.

"We must take great care, Peath," she said, as she stood by his bedside, waiting

for the tea to become cooler, "that you are in good voice for Sunday."

"True," moaned her husband; "and there is the sermon to be written, and my head is so stuffed."

This was said very piteously. Myra suspected the poor head was not stuffed with divinity.

"We must get some scribbling paper," said Peath, using a Cambridge word, "and I must write a sermon by Sunday next."

"To-day is Wednesday," said Myra, "there is plenty of time."

Peath had never written a sermon, and was by no means certain that he could manage a discourse of twenty minutes' length during three days' space.

"Your head is not in a state to be worried at present," said his wife, decidedly. "It will be quite time enough by-and-by to think of such important subjects. I would advise you to keep

quite quiet under the clothes, and I will make you a little gruel or broth. Nothing is so dangerous as neglecting such a cold as you have."

"I believe you are quite right, my dear. The house probably was damp—I am very susceptible of cold. I really believe, Myra," he said, catching a glimpse of her blooming cheek, as she passed his bed, "that you are as strong as a horse."

He had a secret contempt for her strength, and thought that his own delicacy of constitution resulted from his long ancestry, which was very likely.

"It is lucky I am strong, my dear," the wife replied. "It would be very sad if we were both obliged to be in bed, like the old man and woman in the song, and neither of us able or willing to

'Get up and bar the door, O!'"

Peath did not like jokes. He did not understand them, and felt always

aggrieved lest they should be pointed at him. He felt he was trifled with, if not insulted. The merriment which danced in Myra's eyes at the small wonderment how long Peath would have remained in bed under the trying circumstances mentioned in the old ballad, seemed to him, who knew nothing of the song, nor would have remembered had he ever read it, an aggravation of the sufferings that his marrying on a small income had entailed on him. He thought thus: "She does not care, she is accustomed to it; but I have been born in the purple, and fared sumptuously every day, and cannot help suffering greatly, and here is this girl absolutely laughing at my distress, and utterly regardless of the sacrifice I made in marrying her."

There was a certain amount of reason in Peath's complaint. Supposing that two men were saved from drowning and exposed to the violence of storms

and the pinching of cold on a desert rock, one a gentleman and the other a fisherman: the one who had lived in luxury would succumb to privation sooner than the fisherman, and suffer more from its endurance.

"Good Heavens, Peath!" said his wife impatiently, answering his fretful face rather than anything which he said. "Do you mean you had rather be back in that stupid house with those stuck-up people, playing chess with Lord Arras every evening?"

Peath turned in his bed, silently presenting his shoulder to his wife, by way of reply. Myra went to Susan to hold a consultation about dinner.

"What can we have, Susan? We had chops yesterday, you know."

"I really can't say, Miss—that is, Mrs. Peath—I can't get my tongue to it yet, you see, ma'am. I think the cheapest thing would be a leg of mutton.

You see I could cut a little piece off the end for a steak to-day, roast half to-morrow, and boil the knuckle with rice on Saturday. On Sunday you can have a little bit of beef roasted."

To this arrangement the young wife consented. She sent for some scribbling paper for her husband's sermon and a quarter of a yard of cambric for his bands. To stitch these she felt would be a great pleasure and pride. She also ordered a bit of the shin of beef for Peath's broth, and then set to work with Susan to put the furniture in the right place.

CHAPTER XX.

"Ah! gentle dames! it gaes me greet
To think how monie counsels sweet,
How monie lengthened sage advices,
The husband fra the wife despises."

Burns.

On the following day Peath came down to breakfast two hours after Myra and Susan had finished theirs. Myra dreaded his advent, and the shower of grumblings by which it would be accompanied. "I wish I could put up an umbrella," poor Myra thought, "to keep them off."

Peath had never before felt the luxury of having a house of his own, a house in which he was to live all his life. It seemed like his own property, he thought; no tiresome landlord could

come and find fault with any alterations he might make.

He came down, and Myra brought him a delicious piece of toast made before the kitchen fire, well buttered with fresh butter from the farm, a couple of newly-laid eggs, giving him a breakfast with which no epicure could have quarrelled.

When the rage of hunger was assuaged, Peath, with his throat well wrapt up in one of Myra's handkerchiefs, walked out to view his new domain.

The tithes were fairly commuted, and he had five acres of glebe land on which to work his will in experiments. The former incumbent, who had been translated to a better living, too far distant to enable him to hold both, had planted the part which lay in front of the house with winter cabbages. He had wisely considered that money in so small a living was more to be considered

than appearances. They were not pretty to look at, nor fragrant to the sense of smelling, but they were purchased readily for the winter feed of cattle by the neighbouring farmers.

When Peath came in from walking over his domains, he had an air of peculiar importance, which made Myra's dark eyes look rounder from wonder.

"I've seen a very civil fellow. He was farm bailiff to Mr. Playfare, the former incumbent—Lanniss. Lanniss says that he will have those offensive vegetables taken off the land without making me any charge, and advises that it should be inoculated."

"Bless me!" cried Myra. "For what purpose?"

"Ah! you are thinking of small-pox, I dare say. Women, my dear, don't understand such things. He says that inoculation is better than sowing grass seeds, though more expensive at first."

"Oh, Peath! won't you wait a little, and see papa before you plunge into any unnecessary expense?"

"I flatter myself," replied her husband, drawing himself up and looking dignified, "that I am capable of managing my own affairs rather better than Doctor Leith or any doctor living."

Myra said no more. The money, she felt, was Peath's, and she had none to spend nor to save, but she wished with all her heart that her father would come and see them.

Peath was very sullen during the rest of the day. He grumbled at his dinner. The apple-pudding he declared had an unpleasant taste of the cloth in which it was boiled. It was useless to try to convince him that the pudding had been cooked in a basin, and that the cloth could not have touched the top of it, to which part Myra had helped him, thinking that he preferred the thinnest part of the paste. He pushed

back his plate with the air of a martyr, which Myra provokingly did not seem to observe.

Next day when she went into the garden she found a man and a boy busy digging it up.

"Who are you, and who set you to work?" said she.

"We are gardeners. We called and saw the good gentleman yesterday and asked for a job, and he told us to come."

Myra turned away. "Oh, Peath!" she asked, "what are those men about?"

"They are gardeners," said Peath. "The garden is a perfect wilderness of weeds, so I ordered them to come and put it to rights."

"Oh, my dear!" she said, vexed beyond expression, "these men will charge you three and sixpence a-day each for what a common labourer would do as well for two shillings a-day. Besides, dear, I thought it would be such nice exercise for you to till

the ground after your mental exertions in writing sermons."

"What do you take me for, Mrs. Sandridge? *I* dig the ground! *I* plant peas and beans, and lay out flower-beds! You must be absolutely insane to expect such an act from a Sandridge!"

"I am sure I beg your pardon for expecting anything so—useful," she was going to say, but she was sweet-tempered, and changed the word into "derogatory."

She sighed at the seeming hopelessness of her task. She had married a man very inferior to herself, and had expected to guide him, but he seemed to be determined to follow his own devices.

He was, unfortunately, a younger son, with—for his wants—a very small income. For generations the Sandridges had all been born with gold or silver spoons in their mouths, to use a common expression. No bodily or intellectual exertion had been

compulsory on them, and none had been made. As children, they had been fed before they were hungry, and were glutted with playthings before they had found the want of amusement. In youth, they were brought up to consider that they were not obliged to study like poor folks who were forced to earn their bread. They were always careful to go to the best tailor and bootmaker, and to wear perfectly fitting gloves on spotless hands. They, however, held certain traditions, and acted up to them. No Sandridge had ever broken his word, unless to a tradesman. That, of course, did not count as anything. They considered it "good taste" to profess Conservatism, and to uphold the Church, by attending it once every Sabbath day. Generally they had selected wives from their own "order." Poor Peath, for his sins, had made a *mésalliance;* but even his brother excused him when he saw how beautiful was the temptation.

The following day Myra went to the garden to see how the men progressed, hoping to get them out of it by Saturday. The elder of the two on seeing her come forward touched his hat, and presented a bundle of nondescript leaves of pale green tied together by a piece of bast.

"What is this?" said the young lady, severe in youthful beauty.

"These are the cuttings of carnations that the good gentleman wished me to bring. They are all choice sorts, fifty of them, and only cost two sovereigns."

"Two sovereigns for carnations! Why, you are mad, old man! What do I want with two sovereigns' worth of carnations, and without roots, too?"

"I paid that money down for them, by the good gentleman's orders, ma'am, and I expect the good gentleman will pay me for them."

"Why, you man!" cried Myra, "it is an

imposition. How can they grow at this time of the year?"

"I shouldn't wonder if half-a-dozen or so should strike," said the old man, indifferently, driving his spade into the tenacious clay, and dividing a set of wriggling earth-worms, which seemed, by their convulsive movement, as they were flung up with the clods, to contradict the theory that cold-blooded creatures have but a small amount of sensibility.

Myra went away very downcast. Going towards the door she passed the window of Peath's study, and saw him evidently in the pangs of composition. His poor weak-expressioned eyes were upcast to the ceiling, to seek for some form of words to serve his turn.

She saw at a glimpse that he had written down a text, and had not managed, as yet, a single original sentence. All her provocation at his folly in engaging in expenses he could not afford faded into

nothing at the sight of his perplexity. She went in, stepping softly, not to disturb him, wrote a letter, and went out as quietly to post it.

At dinner she ventured to ask him whether it was not a bad time of the year to buy cuttings of carnations, and he replied that he had ordered them expressly to please her, and from the idea that she would be delighted to see them in the following summer on the beds under the window. She answered gratefully, but feared that they would not grow.

Saturday came. Peath had been painfully pre-occupied and irritable ever since Thursday morning. Dreadful thoughts forced themselves on him with regard to his sermon. Should he take a volume of Paley up into the pulpit, and read it aloud? Should he tear it out of its cover, and, placing it in the black leather sermon-case, preach it boldly, defying his country congregation to find him out? Then he

thought with a cold shiver of that organ loft, where there was no organ, but a village choir, whose eyes might, from their eminence, detect the regular lines of print in his surreptitiously introduced discourse.

On Saturday afternoon Myra peeped into his study. "I had no idea," said he, "that it took so long to write a sermon." He had his watch in his hand. "It seems to me, Myra, that I have written a good deal, but I have been timing myself by preaching it aloud, and be as long as I may, I cannot make it last more than seven minutes."

"Ah!" said Myra, looking over his shoulders, and reading the page of washy platitudes, "this is excellent; but, dearest Peath, it is written for folks of a higher calibre than the country people who form your congregation. Here," she added, leaving the little room, and returning immediately, "is a box full of my father's

old sermons—very inferior, no doubt, to anything you could write, but better fitted for the clod-hoppers for whom they are intended. So, my dear husband, cast not your pearls before swine—put away your own manuscript—we may publish it some day—and take one of this bundle, it will save you many headaches. When you have done with it, give it to me, that no confusion may be made between those you have and those you have not preached. It won't do to give it to them again *too* soon, you know, for fear they should remember."

Peath assented. He was too proud to confess how very grateful he felt to his wife for relieving him from the difficulty.

"I wish I had known before I bought all that scribbling paper," he said gloomily. "It is so much money wasted."

Myra felt very guilty of not having thought of that sooner. She ought to

have known that Peath would never be able to use it.

"Never mind, dear; it only costs half-a-crown. I can tear it in two and use it folded in note-paper size when I write to my father. Perhaps he would buy it of us for the use of his next pupil."

Then Myra stopped suddenly, for her father had said that, now he had lost her, he should not burthen himself with another young lout to educate. Yes, he called his pupils "louts." Myra looked at Peath, and fancied that he had become to a certain degree loutish since he had been in his own vicarage.

CHAPTER XXI.

"In these dull walls my days eternal bound."
Pope.

"PEATH," she said slowly, "have you any money? Because if you have, I had better pay the bills we owe in the village."

"Bills already! How can we owe any bills?"

"You know, dear, there are the things we have had at the general shop—coals, candles, and the flour, butter,—everything we have consumed."

Peath looked very much perplexed. "I have a little money, but I do not want to pay it away yet. We must deal with larger shops, where they will give credit.

It is very inconvenient," he continued, looking at Myra, and speaking in a weak, irritated manner.

Myra turned away. She had always had money from her father to settle their modest liabilities, and she felt her face flush all over at the thought of the scrawling figures on a dirty bit of paper which had glared at her from the kitchen dresser. She did not like to go into the kitchen, for Susan would expect the money. She wandered out into the garden, and was confronted by the sight of the old man and his son digging the earth-worms into segments, and remembered that it was Saturday, and that they probably would expect to be paid, both for their labour and for that miserable bundle of bast-bound cuttings, which the elder man had planted in rows in a warm sheltered place under the kitchen window. The dead leaves lay in the hedgerows and covered the stagnant

ditch, which surrounded the garden like a moat. There was a mist which made it doubtful whether there was not a drizzling rain. There were ugly sounds of shouting boys and crying children coming from the neighbouring village.

"It is a comfort that the vicarage does not look into the churchyard," thought Myra. "It only wants that to finish it. Oh, for a break in that close-looking grey sky! Poor Peath! probably he feels the depression even more than I do." She walked to the highest part of the piece of glebe land, stumping along over the tenacious clay in a pair of pattens, which every three minutes became clogged with adhesive mud, and had to be clanged together like a pair of cymbals, to relieve them from their load of earth, cut as it were into oval cakes by Myra's weight. At the top of the field was a "lean-to," as such sheds are called in Essex. A wild honey-

suckle had twined itself over the entrance; and although there was no longer bloom, the graceful stems pleased Myra's fancy, and she thought she would cultivate a few flowers in the summer, and bring a wooden chair to sit there. Being the most elevated part of their small domain, it commanded the high road. Myra looked along its extent in a vague hope of seeing some object of interest, though without any expectation of one. There were a couple of plough horses driven down to the dirty pond to drink; a labourer in a smock frock hulking along with small calves, bent knees, and high shoulders; an old woman with a striped neckerchief tied over her head with a pitcher in one dependent arm, carrying the other at right angles from her shoulder, as if the pulling down of one hand naturally jerked the other, quivering in the air.

"Very dull indeed," murmured the

young wife. Then she thought of her beauty, of which she was well aware, for she had the constant homage of the following and intrusive eye of strangers who passed her, and rebelled in her heart at the thought that she must spend the rest of her life in this vicarage of Thornberry-cum-Slokum. "Oh, I could howl!" cried Myra. And then she laughed at such a way of getting rid of her despair. Far off in the road there was a tiny spot, which seemed to increase in size. "A cart-horse, perhaps. I shall know all Farmer Craven's horses in time. Who knows? I may take an interest in old Mrs. Potter's blue-checked handkerchief, and be curious to know whether she gave elevenpence farthing or elevenpence half-penny for it. It is getting larger now, that spot, not very brilliant in colour. It is a horse—a bay horse, and a cart-horse too. Something behind it. Oh, it is the carrier! I don't expect anything. The scribbling paper is come; much use

it is likely to be. The carrier won't stop at the vicarage. Perhaps I had better go in and see what my dear Peath is about. Poor Peath! I wish they would send him some of their newspapers from the castle. All Englishmen are lost without a newspaper." She turned to go into the house just as the lumbering covered cart stopped at the gate of the vicarage. It was a pretty gate, making part of low palings, which were encrusted with ivy, and made stronger by the encrustation. The fence was without pretence, and her heart had sunk within her when Peath had declared his intention of pulling it down, and building a wall in its place.

Myra did not carry out her intention of going into the house, but walked to the gate with a languid curiosity to know what the carrier wanted.

"Have you got any one here, Miss, to lend a hand? It is wonderful cumbrous to manage," he added, embracing a large deal case.

"What is it? It cannot be meant for us!" cried Myra in a breath.

"Well, mum, is your name Sandridge?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, it is for Mrs. Sandridge. But belike you're the Miss, and the old'un is indoors."

Myra's eyes began to dance with delight. The lumbering great case certainly bore some resemblance to the form of a harp.

"Shall I help it into the house, ma'am?"

"Yes, if you please. Susan! Susan! come quick."

Myra was in terror lest the carrier, staggering under the weight of the harp and its case, should drop it, and break the precious burthen.

"Where shall it be carried?" asked Susan, panting under the weight of one end.

"Into the kitchen, till it is unpacked," replied Myra, whose heart was bounding with pleasure.

The carrier deposited the case upright against the kitchen dresser. Susan did not look best pleased.

"Seven-and-sixpence, ma'am," he said.

"Carriage paid!" cried Myra, in a voice of terror, reading the address.

"Carriage paid by the railway; but seven-and-sixpence ain't a bit too much for my charge, such a lumbering thing, and so heavy. I was forced to deny two young women who wanted a cast in my trap 'cause of this great ugly wooden thing;" and the man regarded the harp case with dislike, thinking of the beauty of the load he had been compelled to relinquish. He stood determined to have his seven-and-sixpence.

Myra looked at Susan, hoping that she would offer to pay him, but Susan was busy with a shovel, taking up from the floor various lumps of clay and grass which the carrier had brought in on the soles of his highlows. In truth, Susan's funds were

never abundant. She was already Mrs. Sandridge's creditor for various small sums she had paid in coming into the vicarage, and she longed to get back to her home and her master at the curacy, and intended to make her return certain by retaining money enough to pay for her journey. "Why should not Mr. Sandridge pay the seven shillings and sixpence?" was Susan's thought. So Myra, with a face that was pale and red alternately, went to Peath for money to pay the man.

"Peath, will you give me seven shillings and sixpence?"

"Why? What for? What can you want money for?"

"I can't help it, Peath, I really can't. I am very much ashamed to ask you for money for myself, but a carrier has brought a parcel."

"Seven-and-sixpence for a parcel! Don't take it in. Send it back!"

"I can't," said Myra, getting very tearful

and angry at the same time. "It is a harp —an old harp that Lady Iris has sent me, I believe."

Peath took out his purse, and gave her seven-and-sixpence.

Myra saw a threepenny bit through the netting, and asked for it in desperation. At her father's house the custom had been that every comer had a pint of beer, and she was shamefaced at the thought of returning to the man, and having to deny his request for some. There was none in the house; but the threepenny bit she knew would make matters smooth.

"A pretty thing this is, Miss Myra, to stand up in the kitchen! How ever are we to try to get it out of its shell, with no chisel or hammer? 'Tis as bad as trying to open oysters without a proper knife."

Myra looked at the outside of her prize and longed to set the imprisoned Ariel free, shut up in the wood. She tried the

corner of the kitchen shovel, but the ill-tempered iron bent, refusing like a bad servant to do anything out of its place. Then she pushed the kitchen carving-knife under the edge of the wood in vain.

"You'll break those knives that poor master bought and paid for, Miss Myra," said Susan. "You're no better nor a child, just a baby—so impatient. If you wait till the carpenter comes home from his work, I'll step up and ask him for the loan of his hammer and chisel." Myra looked at the clock. "He will be home soon, Miss. Saturday is a half holiday. He'd step up and do it, if we had a glass of beer to give him. You had better have a small cask in—nine gallons—ten-pence a gallon. The carrier had better bring it on Monday from the market town."

When Myra returned to Peath, she felt ashamed of having asked him for money, and doubtful whether he would take any

interest, on account of the disbursed seven shillings and ninepence, in the enjoyment she expected from the possession of the harp. She had found Peath, when she went to him for the seven-and-sixpence, with a rapt air, and one of the Doctor's sermons in his hand, which he was trying to master according to the new principles of elocution.

In former days the voice began in rather a high key, and when the sentence was nearing its conclusion, it sank to a softer note. "*Nous avons changé tout cela*," as *Le Médecin malgré lui* says. Now, the voice is only to be raised at the conclusion of the sentence. Peath had taken a few lessons in London when he went up for examination, and he was now practising, the result being first a murmur, then the conclusion of the murmur going off into a most plaintive and interrogative wail.

Myra waited a moment at the door, wonder-stricken, and doubtful whether

her dear Peath had taken leave of his senses.

It so happened that Doctor Leith had, on one occasion, been threatened to be removed from his curacy, by the desire of the rector to reside on his own living. Subsequently he had changed his mind, but not before Myra's father had written his farewell sermon. Now, Peath had unfortunately pitched upon this very sermon ; and being quite careless of the matter of the discourse provided the manner of the elocution was perfect, was overheard by Myra enunciating the following sentence after the manner indicated by italics, where the voice went up in a shrill whine, not unlike that of a dog who is "weary of waiting" for his dinner or his master.

"I beseech you, my chil*dren* (the last syllable a shriek), even if you think my words the babbling of an old and *foolish man* (shriek second), to listen for the sake of the truth I declare unto *you*

(shriek third). It will probably be the last time I shall have the opportunity of *addressing you.*" (Shriek fourth, and most piercing). Myra entered the room.

"Very effective is this new way of managing the voice," said Peath, with great satisfaction.

"Yes, certainly," agreed Myra; "but, my dear, I don't think your choice of a sermon will *quite* do. You see, my love, my father might well call himself old and foolish, for no one would believe the latter, though they knew him to be the former; but you, my dear Peath, are so very youthful—'Severe in youthful beauty,'—you know, that it would be ridiculous to apply either of those epithets to you. Besides, this is your first, not your last, sermon."

"Very true, my dear. I was so intent on applying the rules of the lessons in elocution I had when in London, that I did not particularly observe what the

sermon was about. What—which?—" he continued, not liking exactly to frame his request, that she would do what was safest, and select one for him.

"I think," observed Myra, timidly, "as I know my father's sermons so well (she only narrowly escaped saying, "by rote"), I had better look over the lot. There is a fine one on autumn, about the gathering in of the harvest, but it is too late for that, and too early for the winter one. Never mind, I'll find one which will serve very well." And she squatted on the floor, and upset the pile of sermons, with a feeling that every word of them she had heard her dear father utter from the pulpit would come on her ears seemingly desecrated by Peath's new system of elocution.

"Myra, my dear!" said Peath, in a fretful voice, "how can you?"

She looked up unconsciously from her search. "What is it?" she asked, seeing

that she was expected to look overwhelmed with confusion.

"How can you sit down on the carpet on which dirty feet are placed?" said Peath, impressively.

"My dear, this is Saturday. I put the drugget down myself on Thursday morning, and since that you only have been into the room in your yellow morocco slippers. I swept the room out myself this morning, cleaned the stove, and lit the fire. 'Weal pies is wery good,' says Sam Weller, 'if one knows the lady as made them;' floors are very good to sit on when one knows the lady as cleans them," Myra added, laughing.

"My dear," said Peath, magisterially, "such things must not be done by the Honourable Mrs. Peath Sandridge. She must neither sweep floors nor sit on them when swept. I have only put up with the presence of your father's servant while we are in this state of confusion;

now, I desire you to hire two efficient maid servants. I shall look out for a footman myself."

"My dear!" cried Myra in her turn, dismayed at her husband's proposition.

"What do you find extraordinary in my speech, Mrs. Peath?"

"This," cried the girl boldly, "that you cannot afford more than one servant, and that one a maid-of-all-work."

"I would rather not exist at all than live in such a hugger mugger way," replied her husband hotly.

"You existed very well for a year and a half at the curacy," said Myra.

"Yes, but then I was in a state of probation; I had the hope of getting out of it. Fancy being waited on at table by the woman who has cooked your dinner! Fancy seeing her scorched face, and all the impurities of cooking concealed by a white apron, kept in the kitchen drawer, and a clean cap twitched

in haste from the dresser, where it has laid hid behind the soup tureen!"

"My dear Peath, I suppose you have seen such awful facts, or you would not have deposed to their existence. As to your appetite, I never knew it show any symptoms of diminution whilst you resided with my father. I was in hopes that you would have found the same kind of life tolerable when we lived together. It seems to me scarcely prudent to start with three servants on four hundred and eighty pounds a-year."

"Doctor Leith has only eighty and the house," retorted Peath.

"My father was never without more pupils than one till you came to us."

Myra did not say that a larger sum than usual had been paid by the Earl of Arras for Peath, as his father considered that his son's feelings would have been mortified by the juxtaposition of other young men junior in age, but being far forwarder in information.

Myra felt that she had done mischief with an obstinate man, in expressing herself so decidedly, and that she should do best in now letting the subject drop.

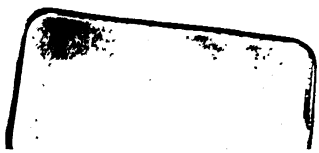
She was but a girl in age, though a clever and wise girl; and she longed to get the harp case open and see its contents, so she sprang up from the floor, and, taking a harmless sermon, *i.e.*, one not intended for any occasion in particular, she presented it to Peath to practise on, and then gathering the rest of the pile together, she pushed them into a cupboard, and went off to see if Susan had succeeded in obtaining a hammer and chisel.

No, Susan had not thought of it. She was washing potatoes in preparation for dinner, poking her thumb nails into the little eyes to dislodge the earth.

"Drat the potatoes!" she said, "every third one I take up is rotten. A fine price to pay for them, too—three and sixpence

a bushel. If you are wise, ma'am, you'll have some set in your garden for next year."

Myra thought of the carnations, and desponded of obtaining leave to have anything so useful as potatoes planted with her husband's permission.

END OF VOL. I.

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